

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Back into Focus: Women Filmmakers, the Amateur Trade Press and 1960s British Amateur Cinema

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## Abstract

While recent scholarship has helped uncover specific stories of women in different commercial cinema industries, there remains a lacuna around the role of amateur women filmmakers within national amateur contexts. Where male amateur filmmaking has often been linked to a range of solitary or group-based leisure pursuits, we cannot make the same assumption about women amateur filmmaker's involvement in social groups, not least due to the gendered nature of domestic and non-work activities in the post-war era. This article considers the representation of women's creative labour across the 1960s within a dominant and patriarchal trade journal, Britain's *Amateur Cine World*. Combining feminist and digital humanities approaches allows us to analyse data from this magazine to reveal recurring debates and tensions around women's amateur creativity, with particular concerns around domesticity, leisure and the gendered nature of technology.

In the 1960s, British amateur cine clubs were at the peak of their power and prestige. Although the amateur movement first emerged in the 1920s, a post-war resurgence of interest in filmmaking was fuelled by new and cheaper technologies, the growth of a professionalised middle class and increased access to leisure time, particularly for men. By the middle of the 1960s, filmmakers could choose to film in 16 mm, 9.5 mm, Super-8 and single 8 mm film gauges; they could use a range of colour filmstocks; and many were able to regularly add soundtracks to their films. The decade represented a boom time within which a network of amateurs produced movies of their families or events of local significance, made short documentary, fictional or experimental works, and contributed to cine club group productions; some of which were distributed across the UK and shown on television. Despite this expansion, the decade did not deliver a democratisation of access and ability. Even with the availability of cheaper technologies, financial barriers still existed: the cine camera may have become a desirable leisure commodity, but the world of the British amateur filmmaker was still white, male, conservative and middle class.

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The role of women in this expansive moment for the amateur film movement, whether as ‘lone’ filmmakers or involved in cine clubs, can be understood in relation to existing scholarship on British women’s post-war experiences, including shifting debates around increased employment opportunities, domesticity and increased involvement in social groups.<sup>1</sup> While male amateur filmmaking has been linked to other leisure activities undertaken outside of work and employment, often as a solitary or small group pursuit (sports, painting, model railway building) or in larger organised groups (amateur dramatics, choirs, voluntary charity work), we cannot make the same blanket assumption about women amateur filmmakers’ experiences of leisure or domesticity in this period.<sup>2</sup> As Claire Langhamer has observed, the traditional conceptualisation of (male) leisure as ‘fundamentally distinct from work is unhelpful to the study of women’s experiences [...]. Many women—notably those with family responsibilities—do not necessarily experience a sharp distinction between work and leisure’.<sup>3</sup> Heather Norris Nicholson has noted a similar discrepancy with issues of gender within the amateur movement:

the number of single women filmmakers [...] increased slightly during the 1960s even though, for one woman filmmaker in Preston, smoke-filled meetings symbolised the still predominantly male culture of club life. Numbers of women holding official committee positions remained small, particularly outside social and secretarial roles. More couples became jointly involved in club productions [...] domestic responsibilities still determined many women’s involvement in formal cine activity.<sup>4</sup>

For women amateur filmmakers in the 1960s, then, filmmaking was likely fitted around their broader domestic or non-work activities, areas that until the last few decades have been marginal or wholly invisible within understandings of film, gender, history and leisure.<sup>5</sup> That marginality underpins our desire to write their experiences back into wider film histories.

Through our research, we aim to unpick the complex cultural implications inherent in the reporting of women’s engagement with amateur filmmaking in 1960s Britain. While acknowledging the exemplary work of Norris Nicholson and Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes, we argue that more needs to be done to reveal the social experiences of women within the amateur film movement; and to broaden existing understandings of the activities of British women amateur filmmakers. This is driven, in part, by discrepancies in data claims around these women: did that number of women filmmakers increase ‘slightly’ or is the later 1969 estimate of 250,000 women amateur filmmakers a more accurate representation?<sup>6</sup> To drive this expansion of knowledge, we have chosen not to adopt the dominant approach to studying such women, which relies heavily on the scarce number that have been identified within archival film holdings. In place of that, we have used data and discursive analysis on the 1960s amateur trade press to explore the tensions that emerged between gender, leisure, technology and the network of cine clubs and publications that represented the burgeoning amateur film industry. Informed by digital humanities methodologies, our analysis identifies a wider range of women engaged in amateur work, reveals gender debates that occurred within this period of British amateur film history and shows clear restrictions on women’s roles while suggesting some opportunities existed for their creativity to emerge.

Given the limited women filmmaker collections available via film archival sources, our investigation offers a significant intervention by bringing into focus several hundred additional women who contributed to the world of British amateur movies. Our data-led approach also shows a complex overlap of filmmaking practices that pushes beyond the dichotomy suggested by terms such as ‘home movie’ or ‘serious amateur’, suggesting that few of the women covered here were strict producers of one or the other approach.<sup>7</sup> This mirrors findings in other feminist-informed film histories where ‘partnerships [and] co-creation [...] challenge conventional notions both of authorship and the film object [...] complicated further by women’s propensity for multitasking’.<sup>8</sup> These amateur filmmakers moved comfortably from lone worker to small teams (often, although not exclusively, wife-and-husband collaborations) to different roles in larger cine-club production groups or related club activities. That

flexibility and interest in collaboration can make the identification of women more problematic, not least due to the trade press' mimicking of established mainstream terms such as director, writer or continuity 'girl'. Such terms are less helpful to amateur histories and archive record systems: instead, we adopt Zoe Viney Burgess' more useful term around the shifting 'cine engagement' that can be found in the careers of women filmmakers.<sup>9</sup>

In creating and analysing its wider dataset the article also assesses the value of a clearly patriarchal trade publication such as *Amateur Cine World* (ACW) for feminist analysis and considers whether a longitudinal approach to its content is more revealing than a focus on single problematic articles, issues or writers. The analysis presented here is not an attempt to reclaim the magazine (or its editorial staff), which remains as sexist in nature as most of its 1960s publishing counterparts. What we suggest below is a way to use digital humanities techniques to utilise such trade journals as a way to offer an important account of the unheralded women filmmakers who feature within their pages. In the process, we will show how this usefully complicates our understanding of the complex and gendered interactions between women filmmakers, leisure, technology and the 1960s British amateur film industry. We believe that rediscovering and identifying the work of these women amateur filmmakers is an important addition to gender-based histories of Britain in the 1960s, allowing their creativity and labour to sit alongside women in other mainstream media productions, histories and archival records.

## Literature review

The last fifteen years has seen a broader awareness that media archiving is a feminist issue where the absence of media produced by and for women 'needs to be addressed by and for future archivists and historians'.<sup>10</sup> Parallel studies by Jane Gaines and Patricia Zimmerman on women in the silent film archive and home movies respectively have further demonstrated the need for more interdisciplinary feminist accounts of women's roles in different areas of film production and across multiple sites of archive practice and access.<sup>11</sup> Our own work was partly inspired by Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight's 2015 collection *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, which outlined both the scale of the challenge in reclaiming women's work within disparate film histories and the archival scarcity that continues to dominate.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Melanie Bell's *Movie Makers: The Women Who Made British Cinema* has offered an exemplary interdisciplinary approach to uncovering the specific stories of women within the mainstream British cinema, opening up 'questions of evidence and the gaps and silences of the archive'.<sup>13</sup> Such developments within studies of film and media history are clearly not unique, and mirror approaches within other historical disciplines where a range of archival sources and approaches have offered alternative histories around gender that relate to, among many others, science and medicine, imperialism and colonialism, class and the politics of archives more generally.<sup>14</sup>

There has also been a welcome increase in scholarship on amateur film itself that has instigated important field-specific foci and interests around amateur aesthetics, exhibition, genre and production.<sup>15</sup> Yet this rise in scholarship has not meant a concurrent rise in research on women within amateur film histories. Unlike filmmakers identified in the more mainstream histories above, these creative women remain marginalised, their gender and amateur status existing 'at a crucial overlap of archival oversight and cultural stigma, doubly negated and invisible'.<sup>16</sup> While Shelley Stamp has produced a brilliant reclamation and reminder of the central role Lois Weber played in the early Hollywood system, Weber was at least a visible figure (even if one that patriarchal approaches to history had ignored).<sup>17</sup> Where the mainstream industry had structure and identifiable roles, the world of amateur filmmaking is less centrally structured and managed, lacking studios, production companies or clearly defined labour roles. This has meant innovative and award-winning amateur filmmakers such as Frances Lascot, Ivy Low, Ruth Stuart, Marjorie Martin and Mollie Butler often struggled to be recognised within the amateur industry they contributed to, never mind gaining any mainstream acclaim.

The main scholarly work on British women amateur filmmakers comes from Norris Nicholson and Motrescu-Mayes. Their recent book offered an initial typology of British women's amateur production based on a sample of filmmakers whose work has been identified and preserved in regional film archives.<sup>18</sup> This approach follows Norris Nicholson's earlier work by focusing more on documentary and observational films, adopting a binary between a majority of films that deal with 'personalised records of private and public events [...] unscripted narratives, a seemingly spontaneous recording of events and activities' and a smaller minority made by 'enthusiasts [who] experimented with small-gauge fiction productions, social issue and commissioned training films'.<sup>19</sup> While both options have a clear relationship with aspects of women's film-based leisure activities, this binary mirrors that noted above, where amateur cinema is seen as having two separate modes of production: 'home movie' and 'advanced' (or 'serious') amateur work. It also reinforces a distinction between solo (home) and collaborative (club) film productions that raises questions about women's experience of filmmaking technology and whether such technologies 'construct and maintain gender differences and hierarchies' in relation to their creative roles.<sup>20</sup>

In this article, we approach the study of gender within 1960s British amateur cinema through a combination of methods that allows us to reimagine the alleged 'leisure'-based work of women filmmakers as components within the complex and disparate networks and structures of an amateur film industry. New approaches to gendered amateur labour can usefully critique existing amateur film histories, offering a history that is not as reliant on the physical films that have survived (or their content) but can instead interrogate the discursive traces found in written or journalistic reports. This stems, in part, from debates in New Cinema History which claim that by focusing on 'the individual text, film history has predominantly served an evaluative, classificatory, or curatorial purpose [...] [it] is largely written without acknowledging the material circumstances of [...] circulation or the transitory nature of any individual film'.<sup>21</sup> Although lacking the same long disciplinary timeline, we believe amateur film history could also benefit from the development and analysis of 'longitudinal databases' drawn from archival resources that can create a broader understanding of the scope of amateur activity.<sup>22</sup>

Our choice of the 1960s is twofold: one, as noted above, it is the decade when amateur film is arguably at its peak, having enjoyed strong post-war growth, and before the period in the 1970s when the new technology of video cameras disrupted its status. Second, the 1960s is a source of recurring debate and analysis within wider studies of British culture and the British film industry, detailing different political and cultural shifts, key films and filmmakers, the rise of key movements and franchises and technological change.<sup>23</sup> A recent reassessment of the decade usefully expanded that focus to consider the 1960s as a period of transformation and tradition, drawing in parallel trends in advertising and fashion, and considering women's roles in those industries.<sup>24</sup> British cinema history has also seen a recent and welcome expansion of approaches that consider the place of women within the history of its national film industry, including continuity 'girls', scriptwriters and the growth of women in the special effects industry.<sup>25</sup> This latter work remains important and influential for our project but also reiterates how scholarship can end at the borders of the mainstream and rarely considers the parallel industry of the British amateur woman filmmaker in the 1960s or beyond, or the transformations and traditions that might have affected their place within the amateur world.

## Methodology and corpus selection

Academically and discursively, then, amateur filmmaking is often set to one side. As noted above, the stress has understandably fallen more on individual film readings that rely on the set of accessible films that have been selected for preservation at a range of media archives, despite the significant gaps in knowledge that exist at such archival sites.<sup>26</sup> Such studies acknowledge that available archive collections impose a smaller sample size that can only function as 'an initial survey of the vast and complex' world of women amateur filmmakers.<sup>27</sup> In an attempt to counter this, our approach explores issues of gender, leisure and technology in amateur film history through the adoption and application

of perspectives, approaches and sources that have emerged from different elements of film history and digital humanities.<sup>28</sup> This approach was chosen as a way to offer a more forensic account of women amateur filmmaking in Britain in the 1960s that moves beyond the small number of women and films that have already been identified. Driven by the collation and interrogation of historical datasets drawn from amateur publications the article reveals a far richer and more detailed picture of women within the British amateur film industry and suggests some of the limitations of judging their work based solely on surviving films, production type and geography.

Our own methodological approach to these women through the collection and collation of data and discourses from the amateur trade press was influenced by parallel movements in film history: new film history and new cinema history. Both offer broad and interdisciplinary approaches to film history that look beyond the film text to a range of alternate contextual sources that allow scholars to consider, for example, fan magazines, cinema exhibition data, film reviews, studio memos and documentation and film ephemera. While new film history still places value on the role of textual analysis, this article is more informed by the digital turn that sits at the heart of recent new cinema history scholarship.<sup>29</sup> The value of both disciplinary movements is in the methodological appreciation and engagement with industry trade press as a central element of discourse around film culture(s).

That is not to assume that a simple correlation existed between the amateur trade press and the appearance of women filmmakers, who were as excluded within the amateur industry as they were in the mainstream.<sup>30</sup> As with more well-known trade journals such as *Variety* or *Kinematograph Weekly*, the amateur trade press featured ‘personality profiles, photographs, advertisements, studio roundups, production plans, correspondence, and industry reports, all enlivened with rumour, anecdote, and gossip’.<sup>31</sup> The bulk of this work focuses on men, in journals dominated by male writers and editors, where amateur cinema is defined in relation to men’s interests around tinkering, gadgets and the technical language of gauges, focal length, synchronised sound and sprocket size. As Bell has noted, the men writing industry trade press articles misunderstood and/or rarely engaged with women’s work, seeing it as ‘purely repetitive and low skill functions’ with a tendency to dismiss or ridicule it.<sup>32</sup> Such trade press reports, however, whether mainstream or amateur, retain ‘significant value for film historians [...] [they] reveal how workplace cultures and their gendered norms, habits, and practices were constructed and contested for their contemporary readership’.<sup>33</sup>

Many early women filmmakers found themselves marginalised by amateur cine clubs and amateur journals from the late 1920s on, with their agency significantly reduced or excluded.<sup>34</sup> Yet *ACW*, the leading UK amateur publication, also appears to have had a loyal female readership, publishing letters from women, mentioning women filmmakers within its pages and (very) sporadically showcasing women writers. As a commercial magazine, it was likely also aware of the estimate that around 250,000 amateur filmmakers were estimated to be women; a significant proportion of their potential readership.<sup>35</sup> If there is a disparity between those positions – clear signs of marginalisation yet with examples of limited engagement – we argue that women’s experience of the amateur industry follows a standard patriarchal pattern. Men remain the dominant audience even when there is a significant and unseen female workforce; men’s experience of leisure pursuits dominates the understanding of those worlds; women’s contributions remain unexplored and unsung. While *ACW* and its successor *Movie Maker (MM)* could be regarded as ‘unconventional sources’ for constructing a feminist history, we are not claiming *ACW* as an alternative archive able to challenge the kind of exclusionary histories identified by Antoinette Burton.<sup>36</sup> Instead, we hope to use these publications to offer a fuller picture of how women were able to operate within this amateur industry, show the complex networks they acted within and better understand the pivotal roles they undertook in cine club organisation. In so doing, we can reclaim a place for these women within existing histories and demonstrate how, while we may be beholden to such sexist publications for data, they cannot fully hide the traces of these women filmmakers’ creativity, dedication and growth.

To do that work, we have adopted data and digitally-informed methodologies found within new cinema history, most notably the work of Charles Acland, Melanie Bell, Daniel Biltereyst, Eric Hoyt, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers.<sup>37</sup> Our approach, which uses historical methodologies drawn

from digital humanities and film historiography, draws on aspects of larger projects (such as Project Arclight) and other amateur projects (the Amateur Movie Database), with the aim of transforming existing published ‘information into a dataset [...] to find and enter pertinent information [...] [creating] new opportunities for analysing the data and exploring this corpus’.<sup>38</sup> Our dataset was based on data taken from the 361 issues of *ACW* ( $n = 327$ ) and *MM* ( $n = 34$ ) published from January 1960 through December 1969. Although forty-seven issues were monthly and 314 were weekly during this period, it became clear that the frequency of informational and discursive references to women amateurs did not vary considerably by issue length, shifts to a different release pattern or changing societal roles across the decade.

The selection of *ACW* and *MM* was due to their status as the dominant commercial publication through the 1960s. *ACW* shifted from a monthly publication to a weekly publishing schedule from January 1961 through 1967 allowing for a larger potential dataset than other monthly publications.<sup>39</sup> *ACW* also ran an important national and international film competition (‘The Ten Best’) that created annual lists of the best amateur films, and curated programmes of award-winning films at London’s National Film Theatre and at other cities across the UK, with some films also included in national and regional television programmes. *ACW* was therefore an important part of the 1960s amateur industry, reporting on the centralised organisational structures, local and regional production hubs, established production modes and national award ceremonies. In 1967, publisher Fountain Press combined *Amateur Movie Maker* and *ACW* into one monthly publication, *MM*. This had extremely strong continuity with *ACW*, retaining the same editor (Tony Rose) and many of the same columnists (for example, Ivan Watson, George Whitfield and John Chittock). *ACW* and *MM* therefore offer the most stable representative of British amateur film reporting across the 1960s: a prime choice from which to collect data on how women filmmakers had been discursively positioned within that industry.

The choice of these magazines was an acceptance that, in Robert C. Allen’s words:

We have to go where the data are, rather than conceiving a question about a filmmaker, a place or whatever, and then looking for the data to support it ... we need to look to see where there are data, and then we look to see what questions we can ask of that data.<sup>40</sup>

The initial process of data collection focused on all references to women involved in amateur film, no matter how small: such references ranged from a single name in a club report through reviews of films these women filmmakers were involved in producing. While this remains a relatively unique approach to amateur film scholarship, the selection, collation and analysis of the dataset represents a relatively ‘low-tech digital’ approach. Yet the advantages of this granular approach to these 361 issues meant it became possible to build up richer data on those women whose names appeared more regularly and across different areas of the journal.<sup>41</sup> That said, many of these women remained a single data point with no additional contextual information within the pages of the journal. This in-depth focus also allowed us to identify the recurrent areas of these trade publications where women filmmakers appeared: amateur film reviews, articles, cine-club updates, letters, lists of award-winners and news pages. Of these, the dominant area remains the club updates due in part to the larger number of women club secretaries included therein, followed by the lists of award-winners, reviews, letters, news and articles. These sections, and the data they contained, are analysed below.

While cleaning up the full data set, specific attention was paid to instances of double- or triple-counting of names, aiming to compress any overlapping names or locations. For example, separate references to Mrs F. M. Webb, Mrs W. M. Webb and Mrs Betty A. Webb, all listed as the Wanstead and Woodford club secretary, and a separate reference to Miss B. Webb as a London-based Filmmaker. As *ACW* only used W. M. Webb once, with multiple references to F. M. Webb, the first two were combined. A separate entry was also used for Miss Betty Webb under the joint headings of Club Secretary and Filmmaker. Given regular inconsistencies around titles, initials or first names in *ACW/MM* reports, the recurrence of names here suggested that Mrs F. M. Webb and Mrs Betty Webb were separate, despite sharing the same address; not least due to ‘Miss Betty Webb’ appearing more

often later in the decade. A similar process was repeated in fifteen separate cases, revealing the difficulty of relying on one single data source and the problematic lack of other contextual information on these women; but it also highlights the ability of this approach to assess and critique the raw dataset to ensure richer and more accurate results.

Separate records for similar surnames were also retained when their club locations were geographically distinct, such as two Mrs M. Adams, one in Harrogate, one in the Cotswolds; while records were combined where misspelling occurred in two similar surnames at the same cine club, as with Mrs G. Glissingham and Mrs G. Gislingham in Hounslow. Common surnames such as Brown or Jones were distinguished by forename or initial and club or filmmaker location. The clear patriarchal nature of *ACW/MM* and its tendency to list the husband's name as the key identifier is familiar within historical gender scholarship. Data clean-up relied heavily on multiple reference points to clarify actual forenames: for example, 'Mrs G. B. [George B.] Whitfield' was updated to 'Mrs Anne Whitfield'; 'Mr and Mrs J. B. Helder' to 'Mrs Beryl Helder' and 'Mr and Mrs Ian Brock' to 'Mrs Fiona Brock'. That level of granularity was only possible due to this approach; however, many women in the list remain tied to their husband's name or initials, or by a single initial that could relate to their own forename or their husband's.<sup>42</sup> The patriarchal nature of language clearly worked to reinforce existing societal structures within the pages of these magazines and elide a fuller understanding of women's creativity: indeed, the transfer of similar language and evidence into film archive metadata processes has led to inaccuracies in accession records and, in some cases, the continued misattribution of authorship to male directors.<sup>43</sup>

The full data collection, cleaning and analysis process revealed 400 women involved in the British amateur film industry across the 1960s, the majority of whom are new and previously unidentified. Of that total number ( $n = 400$ ), it is possible to see some of the specific roles that women played in this industry. Almost half the names captured were secretaries for their local cine-club or cine-society at some point across the decade ( $n = 198$ ), with some of that group also identifiable as creative filmmakers ( $n = 16$ ). Almost half were involved in amateur film productions across roles such as animator, cameraperson, continuity 'girl', director, producer or writer ( $n = 183$ ). A small number were also visible in other committee roles, from club founder to president, chair to publicity officer, although these are generally less reported within the journal ( $n = 14$ ). It is also clear that although they represent a smaller overall percentage, women filmmakers maintained a regular presence in the annual awards and rankings. The sections below explore these areas in more detail and offer some qualitative examples of the trends that emerged across the dataset.

## The gendered discourse of *ACW* and *MM*

Before exploring the specifics of our dataset, we feel it is important to outline the broader discursive context around women filmmakers found in *ACW*. This discourse appears as asides in longer articles, comments from contributors or letter writers or editorial *bon mots*; this sits alongside the journal's consistent use of masculine pronouns when referring to filmmakers across different technical guides, debates around the role of the amateur or specific areas of expertise. Taken together, this creates a dismissive tone around women's contributions beyond the assumed role of 'cine widows': those dutiful sisters, wives and/or mothers who put up with the filmmaking hobby of their brothers, husbands or sons. This position was so well established at the start of the decade that *ACW* could publish a 1961 article entitled 'What Every Woman Should Know About Cine' that was presented as a guide for women 'who feel it part of their duty to take an interest in what cine-keen husbands (brothers, sons, boyfriends) are doing and talking about, but find it hard to keep up with it all'.<sup>44</sup> The article's ideological emphasis on women's assumed domesticity continues with notes about projector lightbulbs that can't be used in the kitchen 'just as you are about to peel spuds'.<sup>45</sup> This reiteration and insistence that women's home-based labour would come before any interest in filmmaking also underlines the gender politics that shaped women's attempts to define their own leisure across the 1960s.

The use of such language reinforces patriarchal assumptions during a time-period when there was ‘confusion, uncertainty and change with regard to the role of women in post-war society’, not least in relation to women taking on more paid work that took them away from the home and parenting.<sup>46</sup> *ACW* offered few concessions to any changing role women might adopt beyond these perceived domestic duties, particularly in relation to the cine-clubs. A 1966 article on how to run a cine-club suggested running an occasional Ladies’ Night social event: ‘Bring your girl or wife and prove where you are every week’.<sup>47</sup> There is no acceptance from this writer of the growing number of women filmmakers, or women club members (as we will demonstrate below): women’s attendance is a route to placate the cine-widow’s ire. In these instances, and elsewhere, the wife or girlfriend is presented as disinterested or even a barrier to the continued pursuit of this hobby. This discourse prevails throughout the decade, with the male chair of Westcliff Cine & 35 mm Club stating:

Married men have only themselves to blame if they are challenged by the frightening words: ‘You’re not going to the club again?’ Make her a member along with some other wives, and if your club is lively, it will include one or two social events to pander to the women folk.<sup>48</sup>

Even allowing that women’s conception of leisure is not as historically well defined as men’s, this statement sums up how the magazine remained ignorant of what women’s own preferred non-work pursuits might be, what women might offer to cine clubs beyond entrenched gender roles or what a wider awareness of women’s perspectives might offer the amateur film industry.

By ignoring the presence of women filmmakers elsewhere in the pages of *ACW*, such gendered discourse (by male article writers) is roundly dismissive or, as the decade progresses and more women get involved, defensive. The insistence on women as a technological novice, the non-filmmaker or at very least a reluctant contributor also reveals the magazine’s articulation of cultural assumptions around gender and film technology. This can be seen in articles that explain key terms (such as aperture, blimp, gauge) or comments that ‘the job of cameraman’ can occasionally be deputised ‘to one’s wife [...] or girlfriend’, with the added warning that ‘as an added precaution you should remove the lens cap and be sure lenses are at the “fixed focus” setting’.<sup>49</sup> As Ann Gray has noted ‘men and women have unequal access to technological knowledge [...] [this] has resulted in an ideology of female-related technical incompetence’.<sup>50</sup> *ACW*’s regular questioning of women’s expertise with film equipment and terminology fits firmly within that ideological position.

## Data analysis

In ‘Starting with Super8’, a nine-part series of articles from 1966, *ACW* contributor Barry Knowles parallels his girlfriend Joan’s experience learning how to use a Super-8 camera with his own Super-8 experiments. Written as a series of transcripts of their conversations across the weeks, it avoids many of the *ACW* assumptions above with Joan presented neither as a barrier or an unwilling accomplice. It does not fully escape the gendered nature of the magazine: Knowles clearly talks down to Joan and adopts an educational and superior tone, at least initially. However, the series also presents her as a novice who makes mistakes but quickly learns how to operate the technology. Importantly, Joan is not a cine-widow, she is young, unmarried, has her own leisure time, is actively interested in film and wants to press on and learn more. The series of articles ultimately offers a compelling portrait of Joan as a burgeoning woman filmmaker: she may have an overbearing filmmaker boyfriend but she could also represent a new type of woman filmmaker, one informed by ongoing shifts in gender and British society.<sup>51</sup> As such, it moves away from the typical gendered discourse found in this publication towards a more complex picture of women and amateur filmmaking: one that can be enhanced with a more granular approach to the appearance of women in the magazine.

To continue exploring the complexity of these amateur women, then, we move on to an analysis of our dataset and how it can challenge some of the dominant discursive attitudes outlined above.



## The club secretary

Given the importance placed on the cine-club in the 1960s, our data confirm the position of Club Secretary as the dominant role women engaged with in the amateur film industry. 198 of the 400 individual women listed undertook this role at different times and in different clubs across the decade, with some moving on to other roles such as Publicity officer, chairperson or becoming more involved in film production. Motrescu-Mayes and Norris Nicholson have read this level of involvement as one that emphasised 'perceived skill and labour: refreshments, ticket sales, correspondence and minute-taking [...] activities [that] sustained club life and visibility'.<sup>52</sup> *ACW* itself offered a more expansive definition and role of Club Secretary:

to arrange the bookings of the meeting place and lay on a programme of films, talks and discussions ... it is advisable to book the whole season's programme as early as possible, leaving plenty of opportunity to members to show their own films and equipment.<sup>53</sup>

Based on this description, and the recurring updates that club secretaries offered to the monthly and weekly club columns, the secretary role spanned a range of skills that clearly foregrounded organisational abilities but also stressed an understanding of the amateur film industry and civic networks within which the individual club existed: making connections with neighbouring clubs and filmmakers; being aware of booking arrangements for guest speakers from that industry; maintaining links with different film libraries to rent titles for any film screenings; using members' civic standing to ensure the club was well networked with local and regional councils and other organisations; and, importantly, maintaining the link between the club and the trade press. This is not simply the domesticity-related tasks of making the teas or taking the minutes stressed in the gendered discourse elsewhere in the magazine but one that clearly sits at the heart of the cine club scene. The role of Club Secretary was seen by *ACW* as one of four essential posts within club structures, alongside Chairman, Treasurer and Publicity Officer.<sup>54</sup> With many clubs regarding this as a unisex role (male secretaries are also prevalent) it existed as a crucial networking role within the amateur film industry and, as such, represents a crucial place for women's influence over the amateur film community.

Despite the wealth of names gathered in relation to the club secretary role there was not enough to offer a full social network analysis that might reveal more about the possible interrelationships between club secretaries. Such analysis can consider the

networks of relations [...] to unveil the impact of innovators within a given field, the role played by personal prestige in disseminating ideas, or the power of particular individuals to shape public opinion [...] providing us with the very tools that allow users to reassemble social phenomena in meaningful narratives of influence, alliance and control.<sup>55</sup>

Although our dataset did not contain enough information to fully map those wider connections, some initial suggestive phenomena can be observed: most notably the ways that secretaries could use their networks to draw together or support other women across the clubs. Outside of individual Ladies' Nights which brought together multiple women in one club (see below) there are reports of inter-club events where women filmmakers might screen their work or act as competition judges. Hilda Meek, secretary for Edgware Amateur Cine Society, was a judge at Chelsea Cine Club in 1968, and accepted an award at the 1965 Edgware-Watford Cine Society competition; at the latter event, Josephine Royle (of Pinner Cine Society) also acted as judge and spokesperson.<sup>56</sup> Filmmaker Mrs Ivy Connor was one of the judges at Wimbledon Cine Club in 1967, a club that included filmmakers Eve Cadden and Irene Stewart.<sup>57</sup> Beryl Helder (Reading Cine and Tape Recording Society), likely working with club secretary Rita Noyes, organised a 1965 'programme of films obtained from lady members of a number of other societies [...] Christine Collins gallantly drove over from Potters Bar to show her film

*Scarlet O'Hara*'.<sup>58</sup> While such events are not regularly reported within the journals, these examples are indicative of efforts by women in club secretary roles to create and utilise such networks to allow other women filmmakers in that industry to interact and gain support.

## Filmmakers and award-winners

With 183 entries in our dataset, the role of 'filmmaker' sits just behind 'club secretary' in terms of women's appearances in *ACW/MM*, representing a significant element of women's contributions to the amateur film industry of the 1960s. As noted above, there is evidence that several women spanned both roles: an important finding given it demonstrates the limitations of existing assumptions that a woman secretary might only serve in one role across these club settings. Marjorie Martin, for example, joined High Wycombe Film Society in 1962, served as club secretary yet remained an active filmmaker across the decade, producing films such as *Service with a Smile* (1962), *Folk Like Us* (1964), *The Stray* (1965) and *Steam-a-Fair* (1967).<sup>59</sup> Beryl Thompson, club secretary for East Barnet Cine Club, was also a key member of a five-strong ladies' team which produced *See You For Lunch* (1966), winner of the club's President's Shield; Miss D. Worrall produced the personal travelogue *Passport to Peace* (1960) while serving as club secretary for Chester Cine Society.<sup>60</sup> Although amateur filmmaking was still imagined as a hobbyist activity, balancing these roles suggests some of these women were able to utilise organisational and creative skills, linking their leisure to the growing amateur industry.

The bulk of data on women filmmakers came via reports on the annual awards run for the amateur industry. It is one of the great inconsistencies in *ACW* and *MM* across the 1960s that the magazine could diminish the role of women on one page and then celebrate women filmmakers' awards success on the next. The structure of the *ACW/MM* annual awards offers an added complication to any simple statistical analysis, with the awards divided into six separate categories: 'Ten Best' (overall winners), Gold Star, Four Star, Three Star, Two Star and One Star. When publishing lists and commentary on the lower five categories the magazines would also distinguish between different film gauges: those films submitted in 16 mm, 9.5 mm, 8 mm and Super-8 mm. Based on our analysis of the 1960s data, women were consistently responsible for 5–6 per cent of all films recognised in these awards. The figure for the highest award accolade, however, shows that women were involved with 10 per cent of the 'Ten Best' films of the 1960s: women may have submitted fewer films overall, but the data indicate that the perceived quality of those films may have been higher.

Award listings offer another site where data are not always precise, extending the issue of naming and title conventions discussed earlier. As in other sections, *ACW/MM* preferred to preface and identify women with the pronoun 'Mrs' – something almost never enforced with 'Mr' – but this is not always clear in the listing of competition films. Joint names and initials such as 'H & B Cubitt' or 'W & M Linden' suggest wife-and-husband teams but there is little corroborating evidence for that beyond the writing conventions of the magazines. Such teams could also be father-and-son or two brothers but, given the patriarchal nature of these magazines and their preference for 'Mrs' or 'Miss' labels, it is highly unlikely these names could refer to mother-daughter or sister teams. More telling across the dataset is how the listed creative attributions for a film regularly overlooked or elided women's contributions within collaborative work. This is clearest in discussions of supposed lone-male workers although can also be seen in the presentation of the labour of wife-and-husband teams.

In coverage of Ten Best film *A Naturalist's Year* (1960) Kenneth Watkins is identified as a lone worker producer and director. It is only in an article on the production of Watkins' film that it becomes clear he is not a true 'lone' worker:

In the recording of the commentary [...] and music background for *A Naturalist's Year* he acknowledges the help given by his wife, who further assisted with constructive criticism of the production.<sup>61</sup>

Two years later, Kenneth and Mary Watkins would be jointly listed for the 4 Star-rated film *Tempering the Wind*, a suggestion that Mary's creative contributions had either grown or simply been fully accredited.<sup>62</sup> In a similar manner, filmmaker Philip Linder was also presented as a lone worker across several *ACW* articles and columns after he won a Ten Best award for *Off Beat* (1961). Linder is given space in *ACW* to write about his filmmaking process and, like Watkins, it is here that his solo status is revealed to be an unheralded wife-and-husband partnership: Sheila Linder was the 'cameraperson' on a previous film *Quest for Freedom* (1960); she was involved in casting and cutting *Off Beat*; and she wrote the story (and operated the camera) for their following film *Ebb Tide* (1963).<sup>63</sup> By 1963, *ACW* would list some films by Philip Linder, others by Sheila and Philip Linder together, and retrospectively referred to them as the joint 'producers' of *Off Beat*.<sup>64</sup> While this might suggest some loosening of attribution it is also worth noting that in both instances, it is the individual male filmmaker who initially highlighted and detailed their wife's contribution not the regular staff of the journal.

Articles also took a less than progressive view towards the place of women when recounting the history of their awards. A celebratory piece on the history of the Ten Best awards credited 1958 Ten Best winner *England May Be Home* solely to Richard Hodkin.<sup>65</sup> Yet three years earlier an article highlighting the Ten Best winner *Frankie and Johnny* (1960) detailed the partnership of Margaret and Hodkin across multiple films, with a clear statement that, in the case of *Frankie and Johnny* at least, 'Margaret wrote the script and directed; Richard supervised all technical matters and production arrangements'.<sup>66</sup> Although there is no clear data here that stated whether these were Margaret's traditional roles, the elision of her from the 1964 Ten Best retrospective again underlines the privileging of the male filmmaker that can be found elsewhere across the decade.

It is also unclear if limitations on women's leisure time impacted positively or negatively on their ability to produce any films let alone award-winning creative work. Certainly, woman filmmaker Elizabeth Dye demonstrated the split demands of filmmaking and home life when she wrote to *ACW* to say she had

banished the rest of the household to *The Guns of Navarone* [...] for one needs space and monastic calm. The house was soon awash with odd bits of film – every room had its quota of "clips" bearing numbers and mystic legends. Domestic washing was bypassed as every peg had been commandeered. Meals were confined to quickly prepared deep-freeze dishes.<sup>67</sup>

Dye's own words directly link domesticity and creativity without the dismissive gendered tone that *ACW* adopted elsewhere. Dye, who was also Dundee Cine Club's publicity officer, does not feature in any awards-related data but her experience is unlikely to be unique across those 1960s women filmmakers who were aiming for such acclaim.

There are several recurring names across the data that point to the breadth of film production such women were involved with. The wife-and-husband team of Betty and Ian Lauder appear regularly ( $n = 33$ ) with 12 separate film titles, including two 'Ten Best' awards. The Lauders, who were not linked to a specific cine club, also demonstrate the range of films that women were involved with: those 12 films include a combination of personal, travelogue, documentary and drama-documentary. Andree Clements ( $n = 12$ ) submitted nine films across a three-year period (some produced in collaboration with her husband Craig) and worked mainly across drama and documentary; while Eve Bysouth ( $n = 6$ ) seems to have produced both personal holiday films and fictional comedies. What becomes clear across the dataset, then, is that there was an impressive range and scope of women's creativity in this decade, and that there is a pressing need for a reinterpretation of current knowledge on the scale and contribution of British women amateur filmmakers in the 1960s and beyond (and, likely, women amateur filmmakers more generally in other national contexts).

## Ladies' sections/groups

Given the presence of lone women filmmakers, wife-and-husband teams and women within larger club productions, the dataset has few examples of more gendered collaborative groups. References to specific ladies' sections within clubs are sporadic with the use of such a specific title discursively signalling that such sections were different to normal (i.e., male) club activity. A 1961 claim that 'Ladies' Sections are often inactive' represents a familiar pattern of ACW being reductive and dismissive of women's involvement in filmmaking.<sup>68</sup> Across the decade, ladies' groups or ladies' nights are reported across a small number of clubs ( $n = 16$ ).<sup>69</sup> With scarce details here, it is possible to see different approaches to such collaboration. Often this referred to specific nights where ladies would take over the club and organise a screening, sometimes including their own films (Bristol, Ilford, Keighley, Mercury); small women-only production teams operated within a few clubs (Boston Manor, Edgware, Ilford, Kent, Stoke); and some (Muswell Hill, Edgware) ran intra-club competitions that pitched the men and women in the club against each other.

Reporting on ladies' nights (or groups) at different clubs also operated in relation to the dominant ACW ideology where a woman is a housewife first, a filmmaker second. The Keighley Cine Circle Ladies' Night is referred to as 'when the men have the privilege of washing up'; the Bristol Cine Society Ladies Night is 'where the ladies provide the programme and gents make the tea'; while the chair of South Birmingham Cine Society, Joyce Skinner, noted that a recent ladies' production meant the men of the club 'have allowed their wives to bring along lighting equipment and have in many cases stayed at home to baby sit'.<sup>70</sup> The tension around the reversal of gender roles that such occasions or collaborations engendered could offer one reason why such activities may have been under-reported in the journals. However, the presence of these fourteen groups – twelve of whom also had one or more women as club secretaries across the 1960s – may be indicative of a wider club element than our data can currently reveal.

## In vision: cover shots and pin-ups

As should already be clear, ACW and *MM* were never particularly progressive magazines, whose development in relation to established views of the 1960s as a sexually progressive decade was limited to a growth in more salacious male-oriented content. This is linked to the editorial leadership of Rose and the increased prevalence of 'cover-girls and pinups and advertisements for filming nudity', the latter representing the expansion of short naturist films for hire or sale.<sup>71</sup> While the collation of data around the magazines' coverage of 1960s women filmmakers does allow a wider perspective than has been available previously we want to offer one final qualitative example that emerges from the data relating to the launch of *MM*. This demonstrates the appearance of a more overtly negative and misogynistic attitude within the magazine's 'Club Newsreel' section. John Wright, editor of that section, stated:

This picture [of amateur Carol Wilkinson] gave me an idea, apart from the obvious, hence this launching of the Pin-up of the Month Competition. The rules are simple: submit a picture of a sweet young thing appearing in your *current* club productions. Statistics are vital: 9.5-8-or 16mm! State the lady's name, title of production, and anything you care to add, although I am hoping words will be superfluous!<sup>72</sup>

The tone, the language and the general solicitation demonstrate a new approach to the visual depiction of women within the journal. Women filmmakers could be celebrated in the amateur trade press but they also had to co-exist with culturally dominant ideas of the woman's body as spectacle or as object for the male gaze. In the early 1960s, glamour images of women on the ACW covers were in a minority: between 1960 and 1963, for example, only ten issues featured women in swimming costumes or bikinis or with a significant degree of naked flesh. In 1961 alone, there were twenty-four

covers with children, six with animals and only three glamour or swimsuit shots. By 1966 that had shifted: thirty-nine issues feature a woman on the cover, with eight featuring either naked or bikini-clad models. Of the thirty-four *MM* covers, thirty-two featured women, with nine glamour shots.

The appearance of more partial nudity and glamour shots runs in parallel with shifts in 1960s publishing where magazines like *Playboy* or *Mayfair* and *The Sun* newspaper's 'Page 3 Girl' commodified attractive and half-naked young women. This is clearly the cultural shift that *ACW* and *MM* were attempting to connect with, a blunt acknowledgement that they wanted to target the estimated 750,000 male filmmakers in the UK more than 250,000 women.<sup>73</sup> The increase in sexualised depictions of women also ran alongside more advertising from companies providing naturist and glamour films, or articles discussing the nudist films of naturist filmmaker Harrison Marks and the underground cinema movement.<sup>74</sup> The inclusion of club pin-ups is part of that broader shift in the magazine. Wright published several pin-ups sent in by cine clubs and exhorted clubs to send more, offering prizes and claiming that club membership would increase if they promoted attractive young women in their ranks: again, reinforcing the idea that clubs were gendered leisure spaces dominated by men.

That this occurred at the same time as the data reveal a rise in women amateur filmmaker numbers, and with more women being represented in Ten Best awards, is telling. The link between the pin-up campaign and club promotion occurred at a moment where cine club membership was seen to be in decline: yet Wright also reported more women were joining clubs. In 1968 Wright warned 'if the ladies gain a foothold, the next thing you know: a breathalyser test before you can run your Eumig [camera]!'<sup>75</sup> Women's involvement is framed here not in relation to domesticity (as seen above) but still acts as a barrier to the fun aspects of male leisure time. This gendered discourse around agency and role reversal clearly related to masculine anxiety around women being in control with the reference to breathalyser linking recent drink-driving laws with women police officers. Wright continued to develop this theme:

I warned you that the ladies were becoming more of a power in cine clubs! [...] Is the time not too distant when the husband will be rushing around getting an early tea for his wife, who has to rush to the local cine club? [...] On holiday, will it be he who has to repeat an action so she can cut on it? Watch out lads! The distance from spool to spin-dryer may be shorter than you think!<sup>76</sup>

Women in control and the associated reversal of gender roles remain key anxieties here although Wright returns to the more familiar domestic ideology (early tea, spin-dryer) that permeates the discourse elsewhere in *ACW* and *MM*. These repeated assertions display a real concern about women's increasing power within the amateur film industry: at club level, as award-winners, and as independent creative individuals that can out-perform, dominate and emasculate the current male filmmakers and their supposed prowess with film technology. Wright's introduction of the pin-up, then, can be seen as an attempt to draw in a younger male crowd and re-establish the previous gender balance within cine clubs that had previously existed; although later columns suggest that the growth in women's involvement in clubs and filmmaking would continue into the 1970s and beyond.

## Conclusion

We will likely never know the true size of the community of British amateur women filmmakers who were 'cine engaged' across the twentieth century, never mind the estimated 250,000 women that were estimated to be part of that industry by 1969. The reasons for this are ideological and institutional, rooted in women's creativity and leisure often being overlooked in favour of men's, the lack of any central database of surviving amateur films, cine club documentation, significant oral history interviews or indeed, evidence from trade journals. The absence of these creative and collaborative women filmmakers from the historical record is as glaring as the estimated gap in media archives' awareness of these women more generally; they remain even less known due to their amateur status and the

overriding assumption that their films were rooted in personal records of their immediate lives and surroundings. We have deliberately tried to avoid describing these women as 'invisible' across this article, not because we disagree with the term but because it may be metaphorically unstable when applied to the amateur filmmaker. As with the case of Weber, for something to be invisible, there is an implicit suggestion it could become visible: yet for many of these amazing and talented women that will never happen.

Our decision through this article has been to accept that while some of these women may fade from history, there remain approaches that we can adopt to bring (some of) them back into focus. Analysis of our dataset has uncovered useful revelations and offered a significant expansion of knowledge around those women filmmakers who were reported as involved in the British amateur film industry. But we are equally conscious the data remain partial. There is little here about the social class of these women, although the involvement with cine clubs, familiarity with (and purchase of) filmmaking equipment, and desire to enter national award ceremonies suggests they were likely as conservative and middle class as the majority of male amateurs. The data also offer no sense of women's growing social independence or any specifically feminist filmmaking, traits that might link these women to expected aspects of 1960s social histories. This acts as an important reminder that reconstructing women's histories includes moments of 'mixed feelings' about the people being researched, and that any history has to recognise 'practices that, arising from women's gender positioning, are outwith both feminist politics and traditional concepts of historical significance'.<sup>77</sup>

Even with those concerns in mind, what we hope remains clear from our analysis is that the roles these women undertook were more than secretarial or organisational: they were key players in a complex network of clubs, national amateur institutions, trade press publications and clusters of local civic activity; many were also writing, producing, directing or acting as cameraperson on multiple amateur productions; they were active across different genres, as capable of producing comedies, documentaries, dramas and newsreels as they were more personal work based around their families, domestic locations and holiday travel; they ran screening events; they won (or were highly ranked) in one of the amateur industry's most prestigious competitions; and they were clearly technologically minded and able. Despite amateur film being seen as a leisure activity, our data suggest that for many of these women it was not simply about leisure or a hobby, it was about an avenue for them to be highly competent and creative members of an amateur industry. That this industry belittled and underrated their contributions, much like the mainstream film industry did for other women creatives, is a historical oversight we hope to help overturn.

In the end, what of *ACW* and *MM*? At the outset we described these representatives of the amateur trade press as patriarchal and sexist and, indeed, there is sufficient discursive evidence to confirm that status. In our attempt to read these magazines as an alternative source for a feminist history we created a granular accounting of references to women, no matter how brief. That data, albeit cloaked in a patriarchal framework, has been essential in helping us unpick some of the complex and gendered interactions between women, leisure, technology and the 1960s British amateur film industry. Some aspects of the magazines continue to obscure the feminist approaches adopted here: for example, restricting the full names of the women involved to married surnames or networks of women creatives hinted at in the raw data. Ultimately, although these amateur magazines were not actively promoting or supporting women's filmmaking, we echo Allen's words that feminist research often has 'to go where the data are'.<sup>78</sup> By utilising such problematic ideological publications we can still find and use the data they contain to uncover the traces of women's cine engagement, bring them back into focus and build a more inclusive history.

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