

Chapter 10
THE BOER WAR
II. Staged scenes of British heroism

INTRODUCTION

When the Boer war broke out, the film industry had been in existence some four years, and had already reached such a capacity that it could represent a big news story quite effectively in several kinds of films. Certainly this was to be the most thoroughly filmed war to date, in terms of both staged and actuality scenes. Staged war films were produced in greater numbers than for any previous (or indeed subsequent) conflict. These scenes were made by several companies in a number of different countries, and altogether I estimate that forty or fifty films of such films were released.¹

I will cover this theme of staged Boer War films by region: including those made in Britain as well as in other countries. But first some general comments. By the 1890s, as we have seen, 'non-genuine' depictions of wars had already been produced in several other visual media, and this panoply of media representations was also apparent during the Boer war. Lantern slides, for example, through drawn and photographic images, depicted such subjects as commanders in the war, or heroic incidents of battle and dramatic deaths. (Fig. 1 and 2) This latter kind of representation found its cinematic analogy in the form of faked films, which were produced, as mentioned, in large numbers. The logic behind making such staged films was unassailable, as Gaumont's A.C. Bromhead explained. When discussing the rash of films made about the Boer War, Bromhead stated that, while films shot 'in proximity to the firing line' were of great interest to audiences in Britain, not all film companies could afford to film in South Africa, and so:

'Those who had not the means, or the enterprise, to send cameramen overseas, which, I am afraid, included Gaumont, were content with such staged scenes as they could produce at home, of which many were made. Some were very realistic, others hopelessly unreal.'²

Bromhead was right to draw attention to a variability in the degree of realism in these staged films of the war (though opinions on this at the time might not match modern perceptions), and there was variety in other respects too. Both battlefield incidents (fakes) and symbolic representations were released, and in some cases there were mixtures between these 'genres' within a single film (e.g. Gaumont's 'atrocities' film, discussed in my British section below). Incidentally, most showmen and spectators would have realised that these were merely representations, illustrations of war, and not reproductions of actual incidents – though there were many spectators who did not know (see some examples in Chapter 2).

Some of the most pertinent comment on the staged Boer War films has come in an article by film historian Elizabeth Strebél, first published in the 1970s.³ Strebél analysed some themes and issues that she noticed from viewing surviving prints, and found most of these films to be imperialist propaganda (I discuss this analysis further below). Strebél's work is excellent; however it is also limited, in that she only considered British examples. My own rather wider trawl through Boer War staged films, shows that those made on the Continent and in the USA have a less one-sided message, with, for example, both sides in the conflict being allowed alternately to win and lose, and without recourse to propaganda.

The limited evidence suggests that these staged films of all types were popular with audiences, though generally not admired by more 'serious' persons, who regarded such made-up films as being mendacious and overly sensational. One commentator on the state of the photographic trade in France in 1900 condemned these faked Boer War scenes ('des épisodes apocryphes de la guerre du Transvaal') as contributing to the bad reputation of the cinematograph.⁴ Henry James later apologised for taking his pro-Boer niece and friends to a faked(?) film of the Boer war, which had been excessively violent.⁵ Some film companies too did not want to be involved with such films. The Warwick Trading Company issued a warning about war fakes:

Do not discredit your exhibits and the general animated picture business by trying to fool the public with faked films. You will be the loser in the long run if you do. The Warwick war films of topical events from all parts of the world are taken on the spot and are not made on Hampstead Heath, New Jersey, France or in somebody's back garden.⁶

But from a film historical point of view these faked films don't deserve such hasty dismissal. One can, indeed, make something of a 'case' for fakes, in the context of the development of film form. Turning New Jersey or 'somebody's back garden' into southern Africa took a leap of imagination on the part of producers. What is more, such fakes often employed vigorous narrative, rich symbolism, and were sometimes inventively staged. They were issued in extensive series by several companies, their makers mobilising considerable resources for their production. All in all, the staged films and fakes of the Boer War demonstrate what I delineate in my Conclusion: that these kind of films – often entertaining and imaginative – contributed to the development of film form in various ways. I should add that on account of the large numbers of films and the incomplete accounts of these in film history to date, I will be including in this chapter more lists of films (in the form of Boxes) than in earlier chapters.

BRITISH STAGED FILMS

Because the Boer War was a British war, the market for films about the conflict was unusually large in the United Kingdom. What is more, production resources in the UK were considerable, for there were several very active film

companies which were producing films, including fiction subjects; some companies had already made or distributed staged films of previous wars, so they knew what could be done in this genre. Furthermore the war lasted a long while and cameramen were not on site for all of it, so these fakes in a sense filled a gap. All the conditions, therefore, were in place for a large number of acted war films to be made, and this is indeed what came to pass. In this chapter I will deal with the British companies which made such films, including R.W. Paul, Mitchell and Kenyon, Hepworth, British Gaumont, as well as a number of smaller producers of such films. First, some comments on general themes which emerge.

Elizabeth Strelbel, as mentioned above, provides an interesting analysis of the British staged Boer War films (she covers films made by Hepworth, Paul, Warwick, Sloane Barnes, and Mitchell and Kenyon).⁷ She divides them into 'rather authentic looking' scenes and 'obviously staged propaganda vignettes' (cf. my 'fakes' vs. 'symbolic scenes' distinction), and stresses the imperialist attitudes which so many of them they evince. Strelbel writes that these films are 'highly revealing of the whole imperialist ethos', and had as their goal, 'to boost the morale of the home population'. In these xenophobic films, she finds, the aims of the British are presented as noble and patriotic, and several films promote the 'mystical power of the Union Jack, symbol of the all-powerful British Empire'.

Indeed the symbolic representation films were particularly prominent in the UK at this time, sometimes not specifically relating to the Boer War, but always glorifying Britain and its forces. A film shown in Crystal Palace in 1901, for example, depicted the whole of the Empire's fighting forces in tableau style, these fighters then 'changing to the lions of Britain': the implication being that all the British Empire was rallying round the mother country.⁸ In other films of this time, symbols of Britain were rife – Britannia, Queen Victoria, the flag, British lions, Tommies, etc. British leaders were acclaimed and lauded in staged films as in the actualities. The commander in South Africa, Lord Roberts, became a supreme hero who was widely filmed.⁹ As a mark of his importance, when he returned to England at the end of 1900, and cameramen missed filming his actual landing, this was faked, as one witness to the filming recalled: 'The "landing" took place on the roof of a London theatre, and the part of Lord Roberts was played to perfection by one of our leading character actors!'¹⁰

But while Britain and its leaders were glorified, the Boers were represented in a highly unflattering light: 'If the British are ever heroic and duty bound, the Boers are portrayed as complete villains', notes Strelbel. As we shall see, several of the films imply that Boers are guilty of perfidy, unfair tactics in warfare, and even atrocities. There is particular denigration of Kruger, who (as President of the Boer Republics) was thoroughly detested in Britain, and was vilified in the various media, including in films. Strelbel has described a couple of the relevant films (which we cover below), and notes that Kruger 'is the embodiment of evil in these films, completely lacking in morals or a sense of justice'. He is even made out to be an imperialist with insatiable aspirations, 'in a classic example of psychological projection', as Strelbel puts it.

One particular theme which emerged in films was that of the 'dirty Boer', a theme which was prevalent in other British media at this time (as Simon Pople's research into the war has made apparent).¹¹ I will deal with Mitchell and Kenyon's *Washing the Boer Prisoners* below, together with its presumption that the average Boer had an 'aversion... to water'. Probably the endless repetition of such stereotypes about the Boers in the media would have helped to instil these negative associations into the British psyche. Sometimes such insults were even cruder. Warwick's *Feeding The Boers* (5447b) was actually not a film of Boers at all. It was film of 'a drove of pigs being fed from a trough in a farmyard', which Warwick had re-titled (the practice I have mentioned elsewhere) in order to make an anti-Boer point. The catalogue added: 'In their endeavour to get the food they clamber over one another displaying their anatomy in not too delicate a manner.'¹²

This was indeed crude propaganda, but like all propaganda had some vague connections to exploit, in this case, presumably that many of the Boers were farmers (the Dutch word 'Boer' indeed means 'farmer'), and so dealt regularly with farmyard animals. But this presentation to British audiences of Boers as 'dirty', was in all likelihood the opposite of reality, for while many British Army recruits and indeed film spectators at this time lived in grimy slums, the Boers lived in the expanses of South Africa (and indeed their 'ideal' way of life sometimes inspired the envy and admiration of British officers sent to fight them). For the rest of this section I will look at staged films about the war by particular companies, roughly in order of which were produced first.

R.W. Paul

As I have noted in the previous chapter about filming the Boer War, R.W. Paul sent at least one cameraman to the front, but he realised that such films would inevitably lack action. Making fakes was Paul's parallel strategy to provide more dramatic war imagery to complement his genuine views, as he later recalled:

'To meet the demand for something more exciting, representations of such scenes as the bombardment of Mafeking and the work of nurses on the battlefield were enacted on neighbouring golf links...'¹³

(Incidentally, one later source confirms the golf links claim: see below.) It would seem that Paul was the first British producer to make and release fakes of the war. His first batch was released and reviewed before the end of November 1899, which was over a month before he released any actualities shot in South Africa.¹⁴ Apart from the dramatic aspect, this was another advantage of fakes, that they could be shot quickly and at short notice. A photographic journal at the time reported that these films 'reproduced... a number of the most exciting and interesting incidents of the campaign up-to-date', adding some more details:

'They are the most elaborate animated pictures yet undertaken, and are complete [in] every way. The photographs are perfectly clear and sharp and are printed on a special thick and durable film. Owing to the

enormous expense, and the number of men engaged, the price will be at the rate of 1/- per foot. The subjects up to the present are nine in number but other scenes will be ready shortly.¹⁵

The figure of nine films seems to tally roughly with the titles which we know appeared before the end of the year (see **Box** below) though the cost was slightly lower than was stated here. Titles included *A Camp Smithy*, *Shooting the Spy* and *Nurses on the Battlefield*, some of which I will discuss later. The following year Paul released other staged films about the war, and altogether I estimate that he made some thirteen such Boer War films.¹⁶

We do not know too much about the production of these films, though I have found a couple of indications that they were indeed made, as has often been supposed, in Muswell Hill, near where Paul was based. One clue to this is a claim from a couple of years later that:

‘A very striking series of films, showing an armoured train in action in Natal, was popularly known in the trade at the time as “the Battle of Muswell Hill,” for if report spoke truly, it was produced by fitting up a truck with loop-holed sides, manning it with khaki-clad supers, and running it before the camera on a siding to the north of London.’¹⁷

He was presumably referring to Paul’s, *Wrecking an Armoured Train*, listed below, a representation of one of the first incidents of the war. About the time that Paul’s films were made, another trade writer referred to a title, ‘The Battle of Colenso’, confiding that ‘we happen to know that it was taken near Muswell Hill’.¹⁸ While there is no such film among the list of Paul’s fakes, below, one of his other fakes depicting a battle could easily have been assigned this title. Thus two separate sources give Muswell Hill as the location of the production of fake Boer War films, and the only British producer based there who is known to have made such films is R.W. Paul.

There is little information about the performers who enacted these films. There is one later (doubtful) claim that Paul himself appeared in one of them.¹⁹ There is better evidence that one of the fakes featured a music hall actor, Lewin Fitzhamon (destined to become the leading director for the Hepworth company). It is not clear which of Paul’s films it was, but apparently it comprised a sequence from one of Fitzhamon’s music hall sketches of 1900, ‘Briton vs. Boer’.²⁰ An article about Fitzhamon added a detail about the film:

‘His first experience in film producing was for Mr. Paul at the commencement of the Boer War, when he experienced his first of many near shaves and escapes from sudden death at the hands of an excitable Boer of Irish persuasion.’²¹

This Irish aspect refers to the fact that there were a group of Irishmen who went to fight for the Boers, though Denis Gifford, who interviewed Fitzhamon, stated that ‘Fitz’ himself played the Irishman (but this is a misunderstanding which might easily arise). Gifford also tells us that, while the film was advertised as taking place on the open veldt, ‘in fact, it was shot on a golf

course'. This ties in with Paul's statement above that he made these fakes on some 'neighbouring golf links'.²²

One article about Paul's fakes claimed that they were made 'with the assistance of a retired officer who has seen 18 years active service in the Transvaal', or as Paul's catalogue put it, 'an experienced military officer from the front'.²³ [Fig. 3] Who was this man? Paul later recalled that the films were made, 'under the supervision of Sir Robert Ashe, an ex-officer of Rhodes's Force'.²⁴ I have had no luck in tracing Ashe. He is not in the Army lists in the 1880s and '90s, so was not an officer in the British Army in this period. Nor does Ashe appear in the various biographical dictionaries of the time. It seems possible, suggests an expert at the National Army Museum, that he was a member of one of the various local units which were being formed in South Africa during the 1880s and 1890s, and was knighted for his services during the war. However, no trace of him can be found in biographies of Rhodes nor in the Transvaal Archives.²⁵ It may be recalled from my section on filming the war, that the cameraman whom Paul also allegedly employed in South Africa, Sydney Melsom, remains equally untraceable in any source. One wonders if Paul was mis-remembering both names.

Until recently *Kruger's Dream of Empire* was thought to be the only one of Paul's fakes to be extant, but two others have now come to light. *A Camp Smithy* was identified at the New Zealand Film Archive, and in 2005 *Attack on a Picquet* was located in a private collection.²⁶ [Fig. 4] These suggest that the fake films were not all of a piece: while *Attack on a Picquet* is stylized, *A Camp Smithy* is rather realistic. Paul's fakes were listed in his catalogues as, 'Reproductions of Incidents of the Boer War', so there would have been no doubt in purchasers' minds that they were buying fakes, though this information might not always have been passed on to audiences. As Paul later recalled about his staged Boer films, 'These were issued for what they were, though I cannot vouch for the descriptions applied to them by the showmen'.²⁷

Most of Paul's staged Boer films were representations of battlefield incidents, though there are few examples of different 'genres'. *Briton Versus Boer* was probably an allegory of some kind; *His Mother's Portrait* was a story film rather than being a 'fake' as such. Then *Kruger's Dream of Empire* was – or rather is, for this film survives – a 'symbolic representation', and is particularly rich in imagery, indeed overloaded with it. As one can see from the synopsis below, the film contains a panoply of symbols of Britain: Joseph Chamberlain, the Crown of England, the Queen, Union Jack, and Britannia. Clearly this falls into Strebel's territory of propaganda, as do some of the fakes, such as *Attack on a Picquet* which demonises the Boer enemy. On the other hand, *Nurses on the Battlefield*, according to the catalogue description, was more sympathetic, with both a Boer and a British soldier being offered medical care on the field of battle.

Box:

R.W. Paul's staged Boer War films

Note that release/review dates are from John Barnes' 1899 and 1900 volumes.

Abbreviations: RWP = Paul catalogues.²⁸ PD = 'Transvaal War Films', PD Dec 1899. [EGS] = Strebel. [C] = one of the films listed in Paul's catalogue (six were listed).

* (asterisk) indicates a film which is extant.

**Attack on a Picquet* (40 ft.) (25 Nov 1899) 'A British outpost is seen gathered round a camp fire, when a party of Boers steal out from an ambush, club their sentry and fire on the soldiers from all sides.' [RWP] Or as the archivists who preserved this film describe it: a group of British soldiers hides in the shelter of some bushes, before they're attacked and killed by some Boer fighters, who make off with their weapons.²⁹ [C]

Battle of Glencoe (80 ft.) (25 Nov 1899) 'A party of Boers on a hill are attacked by the British with a Maxim. Volley and independent firing are followed by a gallant charge up the hill, in which the Boers are driven over the ridge, many being left on the field, killed or wounded.' [PD]

Bombardment of Mafeking (60 ft.) (25 Nov 1899) 'British soldiers are seated outside a hut when several shells explode near them. The ineffectual bombardment causes much amusement.' [PD] 'The British soldiers are sitting round the camp fire. Several shells explode near them, causing much amusement.' [RWP] [C]

Shooting the Spy (60 ft.) (25 Nov 1899) 'Scene outside a guard-room, with a sentry on duty. An escort comes up with captured Boer spy, who is fired upon, falling dead.' [PD; RWP] [C]

Nurses on the Battlefield (60 ft.) (9 Dec 1899) 'A most affecting picture, but very beautiful and natural. It depicts the battlefield with the wounded and dead scattered over it. The picture shows the stretcher party with doctor and his orderly, who, with the nurses, are tending a wounded Boer. At the same time a British soldier is carried down by his comrades to the other nurses. Specially recommended.' [RWP]³⁰ In Paul's catalogue there is a frame illustration from this film. [C]

**A Camp Smithy* 'Splendid scene of the camp smithy, with horses being shod, &c.' [RWP] 'A surprisingly complex tableau of camp life', says Ian Christie. [C]

Capture of a Maxim (? ft.) (9 Dec 1899)

Wrecking an Armoured Train (100 ft.) (9 Dec 1899) 'A graphic and complete reproduction of the armoured train incident at Mafeking. The British are seen defending the train and firing on the Boers. Several are wounded, and at last the British officer hoists a white flag in token of surrender.' [RWP] (a shorter description is in [PD]) [C]

Snowballing Oom Paul (? ft.) (nd) 'Some school children have made a snowman effigy of Kruger. They then vie with each other to knock its block off. Eventually, the snow effigy is completely trampled under foot.' [EGS]

**Kruger's Dream of Empire* (63 ft.) (19 May 1900) 'Kruger appears in a room with a large canvas with the inscription "On Majuba Day the British were Defeated".³¹ Rubbing his hands and chuckling, he settles in a chair for a nap.³² He then dreams

that his enemy Joseph Chamberlain offers him the Crown of England, but as he jumps up to grab the crown it vanishes in a puff of smoke. Chamberlain then points to the canvas whose inscription now reads 'On Majuba Day Cronje Surrendered'. Kruger lunges at his tormentor, but the latter vanishes as mysteriously as the crown. Kruger then turns to find that a pedestal which formerly bore a bust of himself now boasts one of the queen of England. He attempts to knock it down but is restrained by four men in khaki who envelop him in a large Union Jack, lift him on a stand, and fire a volley. The flag falls and Kruger has been transformed into Britannia.'³³ [EGS, RWP]³⁴

Briton Versus Boer (June 1900) [no synopsis]. L. Fitzhamon appeared in this film.

His Mother's Portrait; or, The Soldier's Vision of Home (July 1900) 'A C.I.V. is seen parting from his aged mother. She gives him, as a memento, a framed portrait of herself, which he kisses and puts in his breast pocket. The scene switches to the open veld where we find the soldier wounded and staggering for help. He faints and has a vision of his mother praying on bended knee. Discovered by Red Cross attendants, it is found that the soldier's wound is not serious, the bullet having been deflected by the mother's portrait.' [EGS]

Britain's Welcome to her Sons (Sep 1900). [no synopsis].

Mitchell and Kenyon

The chief claim to fame in film history of the Mitchell and Kenyon company (or 'M&K' as we shall abbreviate it) has always been their faked films of the Boer War. Indeed for a long while this was thought to be their main activity. In recent years as their films have been rediscovered and restored, and their wider activities in the early film industry have been researched (by the National Fairground Archive and the BFI), it has been realized that Boer related films were but one part of the work of this important company. Nevertheless it was a significant part, consisting of actualities and local films as well as the fakes. [Fig. 5]

M&K were probably the most prolific of all producers of Boer War fakes, turning out between 15 and 20 such films.³⁵ These included such evocative titles as *The Fight for the Gun*, *Tommy's Last Shot*, *Washing the Boer Prisoner*, and *The Dispatch Bearer*.³⁶ Several of the films have been rediscovered in recent years, and ten or eleven titles are now known to be extant, enabling us to assess the aesthetics of these films more completely.³⁷

Denis Gifford has described them as 'rough but lively re-creations of the Boer War' and this captures the style admirably, if not the chauvinistic message.³⁸ The films depict the Boers as sneaky and immoral, who repeatedly do dastardly deeds, such as overpowering a sleeping Tommy, poisoning a well, attacking women and the Red Cross. The titles indicate the tone: *The Sneaky Boer*, for example, or *White Flag Treachery* (the latter presumably alluding to instances of Boers pretending to surrender and then firing). The Boers do not even behave decently among themselves, for in *Surprise of a Boer Camp* they are shown fighting one another with knives. The British, by contrast, are shown as heroic and often victorious in the face of these low Boer tactics.

Simon Popple has given a fine brief account of the films and has explored the propaganda aspect. He notes that films such as *White Flag Treachery*, *Shelling the Red Cross*, *A Sneaky Boer* and *Poisoning the Well* allude to anecdotes about Boer atrocities circulating in the popular press.³⁹ He draws particular attention to *Hands off the Flag* in which the Boers menace a group of defenceless nurses as well as defiling the British flag, and women and flag are only saved when British soldiers arrive on the scene. The flag is an important symbolic element in this film, and other aspects of the symbolic film creep into these fakes at times, such as at the end of *Saved by a Woman* when there is a 'tableau'.

Popple also discusses the one anomaly in the group, and what was probably M&K's final Boer-related acted production: a film entitled *Chasing De Wet* which ridicules the British Army's failure to capture the Boer commander, De Wet. This is a comic trick film, with stop substitution, as De Wet appears and disappears before the soldiers' eyes; and Popple points out that this is the only sympathetic treatment of the Boer enemy in the M&K corpus, in expressing admiration for the General's cunning.⁴⁰ I append, as a **Box**, a list of M&K's Boer War acted films, with descriptions where available, which gives a more complete impression of the content and style of these productions.

Despite extensive research in recent years, little is still known about the production of these Boer fakes. To judge from release dates the first titles were probably shot in the Spring of 1900, but there is disagreement about where they were filmed and the identity of the performers. The films were certainly shot near Blackburn in Lancashire, but one source says in the Brownhills [sic] area, another that they were made in 'the sandhills that flanked the railway between Kearsley and Clifton'. The source for the latter claim was an actor from a travelling fairground company, and a newspaper article added about him that, 'he and his whole company were engaged by a Blackburn firm to act for the films in a Boer War story and a mining drama'.⁴¹ On the other hand, John East, a film pioneer, stated that the films were shot 'with out-of-work miners playing the part of Kruger's army!'⁴² There may be a morsel of truth in all these claims, for, as the films were made in several tranches, more than one group of performers and more than one location might have been used.

The popularity of M&K Boer fakes; *The Dispatch Bearer*

The M&K Boer fakes made quite an impression at the time and in later memories too.⁴³ One of the earliest successes that the film pioneer, Fred Weisker enjoyed, was with exhibiting *Poisoning the Well*, which he recalled was met with great enthusiasm locally (in Liverpool).⁴⁴ Another in the M&K series, *Washing Boer Prisoners*, was founded on the insulting stereotype, which I've discussed above, that the Boers were dirty. Stereotype or no, the

Box:

The Mitchell and Kenyon Boer War fakes

Abbreviations:

PD 1.5.00 = 'John Wrench & Son', PD May 1900, p.115.

Sh 6.9.01 = M&K ad in *The Showman* 6 Sep 1901, p.xi.

Era 28.9.01 = John Wrench & Son ad in *The Era* 28 Sep 1901, p.27.

NWFA = North West Film Archive.

IWM = Imperial War Museum.

CM = Cinema Museum.

EE = *Electric Edwardians* DVD.

* (asterisk) indicates a film which is extant.

**The Dispatch Bearer* aka *Despatch Rider* (72 ft.) – Some British riflemen are attacked by Boers and left for dead. One of the Boers then removes a dispatch from a fallen Briton, but another wounded man struggles to his feet, shoots this Boer, and proceeds on his way with the dispatch. (My more complete summary is in main text.) (PD 1.5.00; Sh 6.9.01) NFTVA, NWFA and IWM

Washing the Boer Prisoners aka *Washing Boer Prisoner[s]* (PD 1.5.00; Sh 6.9.01)
(See main text for plot details).

**Winning the V.C.* aka *Winning the Victoria Cross* (53 ft. or 58 ft.) – Four British gunners are under fire; one falls wounded as the others advance; a cavalryman rides up to the rescue, drags the wounded man onto his horse and rides off. (PD 1.5.00; Sh 6.9.01) NFTVA

White Flag Treachery (PD 1.5.00) [no synopsis]

**Shelling the Red Cross* aka *Boer Attack on a Red Cross Outpost* (68 ft.) – A tent is pitched on the veldt, with a Red Cross flag fluttering prominently outside. Wounded British soldiers on stretchers are taken inside and received by a nurse. A Boer emerges from behind the tent and throws a bomb which fails to go off, then a second bomb, which rolls into the tent and explodes. The Boer runs away, and the victims stagger out of the tent in disarray, the nurse being among the casualties. Strebel describes this as a 'very authentic-looking' fake, and one which underscores Boer treachery, for the second bomb shows that this attack on the wounded was no accident. The film seems to be in the same setting as *The Dispatch Bearer*. (PD 1.5.00) NFTVA, NWFA

**The Nurse's Brother* – The plot has the protagonist being saved by a woman. Note that the film seems to use the same set as *Lost Scout...* (PD 1.5.00)

**The Clever Correspondent* (16 m.) (CM) [no synopsis]

**The Lost Scout on the Veldt* aka *Lost on the Veldt* 1900? (Sh 6.9.01)

**Rescue of a Wounded Gunner* (55 ft.) – Two British soldiers pull a big gun into position, shots are exchanged and one of the soldiers is wounded. A third soldier arrives on horseback, dismounts, and helps the wounded soldier onto the horse. To create the effect of gunfire, stars are scratched on the film.⁴⁵ NWFA

The Fight for the Gun (65 ft.) – Boers attack a British machine gun position and capture it after a tough fight. British rescuers arrive and recapture the gun, which is put into operation again, '...amid a scene of wild enthusiasm'. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)

- **Hands off the Flag* (113 ft.) – A group of nurses are at a Red Cross station captured by Boers. The Union Jack is torn down and trampled, and the nurses are about to be shot when British soldiers return, scatter the Boers, thus saving the nurses who raise the flag again. (Sh 6.9.01, Era 28.9.01 and Poppo)
- **Poisoning the Well* (91 ft.) – A Boer creeps up to a well, intending to poison it. He is interrupted by two British soldiers, who then depart. As he tries again, another British soldier arrives, they struggle and the Tommy is knifed, but then the Boer is finally killed by two more British soldiers. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)
- Saved by a Woman* (83 ft.) – A wounded British soldier reaches a tent and two women help him. His Boer pursuers arrive but one of the women keep them at bay with a revolver. As they attempt escape the woman is shot, but British soldiers arrive and save the day, ‘... and the picture finishes with a very effective tableau.’ (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)
- *A [*The*] *Sneaky Boer* aka *A Skirmish With Boers* (75 ft.; orig 82 ft.) – A British soldier on watch falls asleep. Two Boers sneak up and overpower him, but another soldier arrives and overcomes the Boers before helping his wounded comrade away. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01) NWFA; CM; EE.
- Surprise of a Boer Camp* (90 ft.) – A group of Boers are gathered round their campfire when a card game turns into a dispute and then a knife fight. Shortly afterwards some British soldiers attack the camp, which, ‘...after an exciting hand-to-hand struggle, is taken by the Britons’. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)
- A Tight Corner*. (232 ft.) – This film was in four ‘Tableaux’ or shots: *A Dash for Help*; *Through the Enemy’s Lines*; *The Message Delivered*; *Just in Time*. A messenger is sent from a hard-pressed unit to fetch help. Fighting his way through the Boer lines, he reaches the British camp and requests urgent assistance. A relief force is sent, and reaches the embattled force just in time, and after ‘a wild charge’ the Boer besiegers are routed. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)
- Tommy’s Last Shot* (95 ft.) – British soldiers defend a trench but one by one they are shot. The sole survivor rushes forth, firing at the Boers, only to be shot himself, falling amid bursting shells. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)
- **Chasing De Wet* (1901) (108 ft.) – This comic trick film shows the attempts of an English and a Scottish soldier to capture De Wet, but he keeps escaping, (depicted through stop motion) and they never manage to catch him. (Sh 6.9.01; Era 28.9.01)

film was a hit, and was singled out by a critic at Norwich fair as ‘a most amusing film’.⁴⁶ It was even recollected years later by a spectator of the time (then a schoolboy) as hugely popular:

‘During the South African War we schoolboys were excited by “scenes from the front.” One which I remember showed a prisoners’ camp and the aversion of Piet to water. It always ended in his being dipped in a large bucket, head first. Although we boys knew exactly – by constant attendance – what was coming, it never failed to “bring down the house.”’⁴⁷

But of all these films, the most popular and noticed title was almost certainly *The Dispatch Bearer* (or *The Despatch Rider*). This appears in promotional material of the time as the lead item, or most common title, among other M&K fakes.⁴⁸ (I offer a synopsis below). It was singled out by one early writer as a picture which was ‘hailed with wild applause in more than one London music-hall’, this popularity achieved despite, he noted, being the most obvious of fakes.⁴⁹ It certainly made an impression on Alfred Bromhead, head of Gaumont: when reminiscing in the 1930s about the films of the Boer War era, this was the one title by Mitchell & Kenyon which he recalled. The film had been taken, he supposed, ‘in some ploughed fields near Blackburn’ and, he remembered (or rather misremembered) that it ‘portrayed a gallant British dispatch bearer, fighting his way with the butt end of his rifle through crowds of Boers...’⁵⁰ Another early film pioneer, George Green, also misremembered to the extent of actually claiming to have produced *The Dispatch Bearer* in Scotland, which perhaps indicates more about the success of the film in its time than the reliability of memory.⁵¹

The Dispatch Bearer was widely shown in the UK, and it is almost certainly this film which is being referred to in an interesting article of 1901 about effective showmanship. The article discusses the screening of Boer War films in a large northern city where the attendance had begun to flag, and relates an anecdote on this point (possibly apocryphal). To rebuild local interest it seems that the showman had an idea for a live incident which would grab attention, and so he placed a colleague in the audience dressed up in an Army uniform, to await the right moment. Among the films on show was one which (though it is described inaccurately) must have been *The Dispatch Bearer*. The setting was South Africa, and: ‘A dispatch-bearer is seen in the distance, threading his way through the rocks, closely pressed by half a dozen Boers ; he turns and kills three of his enemies, but the rest bear down upon him, and they all roll over and over on the ground.’ The article describes what happened as this was being screened with the fake soldier, Bill, in the hall:

At this picture there was a commotion among the audience. A man, evidently a soldier [i.e. Bill], for he was dressed in khaki, was seen struggling in his seat, but held back by companions. “Let me get at them – let me get at them !” he cried again and again. The band stopped playing, the lights were turned up, and the lecturer stepped forward and spoke kindly to the man in khaki. “My good man,” said he, “you must not get so excited; those were not Boers, but only pictures of Boers.” The man in khaki looked round vacantly for a moment, put his hand to his head, and exclaimed, “Good heavens, I thought it was all real !” and sank into his seat. Cheer upon cheer rose from that audience. This one touch of nature had made them kin. And the next morning the local papers described the incident in glowing terms, one of them in its admiration even going to the length of a leaderette. From that evening the show was patronised so well that not a vacant seat was to be seen. And Bill was richer, that same week, by a five-pound note.⁵²

The Dispatch Bearer survives in at least two film archives (NFTVA and IWM), and is worth describing in some more detail, both because of its notable status within M&K productions (which I have just discussed), and also because in some ways it is typical of the complex narratives one encounters in faked films of this era. The film runs somewhat over one minute, and is in the form of a single wide shot. There are six characters, three British and three Boers, and for clarity I will call them Brit 1, 2 and 3; and Boer 1, 2 and 3. As will be apparent, this is actually a highly intricate narrative, and it takes several viewings to work out exactly what has occurred. (Perhaps that's why the description by the writer quoted above is inaccurate).

The film begins as Brit1 and Brit2 approach a hillside where there are three Boers. In the brief fight which follows Brit1 is killed and Brit2 wounded, and Boer1 is also wounded. Brit3 then arrives with dispatches, but is shot and about to be clubbed to death by Boer2 when the latter is shot by the wounded man, Brit2. Then Brit3 offers Boer1 water, and as he is doing so is about to be shot by Boer3, but he shoots Boer3 first, and is in turn shot by Boer1, who steals the dispatches. Brit2 struggles with and shoots Boer1 and then carries off the dispatches to be delivered.

As I say, very complex, especially because this rapid tit-for-tat exchange happens in one wide shot in little over a minute of screen time. A spoken commentary would help with comprehension, and my guess is that this would have been provided during some showings at the time, by a lecturer (the anecdote above mentions one). It should be added, however, that even without narration and on a first viewing, though the film is confusing, it is also quite effective in giving a *general* impression of a desperate fight to the finish, even if one cannot take in every incident. A key theme of the film, *pace* Strebels' analysis, is Boer treachery, notably when one of the British soldiers offers water to a wounded Boer and is attacked by another during this act of mercy. As mentioned, Boer perfidy was a regular theme in fakes made by M&K and by other British companies.

There are a number of points of stylistic interest in these M&K films. Staying with *The Dispatch Bearer* for a moment, the details of gunfire are notable. As a means of showing explosions clearly, when there is a shell burst at one point, the first frame or two is scratched onto the image – quite effectively in fact (and this technique is employed in another M&K fake – see **Box**). Another means of showing gunfire visibly in this film is through having lots of smoke issue from the rifles when they are fired. (This was, of course, very unrealistic given that smokeless powder had come into general use in the 1890s, though as I have noted in Chapter 1, this bit of unreality for the camera was to become a regular sight in later films, especially westerns.)

These techniques – scratching on gunshots and smoky powder – were both means of creating cinematic visibility, of drawing attention to particular points of action. Yet ultimately, as I have indicated above, this film remains narratively confusing because, despite these tricks to create visibility, there is simply too much going on in the frame: the acted narrative is too complex and 'uncentered' for a single shot. An emerging solution to this lack of 'centering'

was to split an acted story into several discrete elements or shots. In common with some other filmmakers, M&K seems to have realised about this time that multi-shot construction was the way forward, and in one of their Boer War fakes, *A Tight Corner*, there are four separate shots. This, made in 1901, probably in the late Summer (and sadly not extant), is an early example of multi-shot construction in an acted film, albeit a year after Williamson's *China Mission* film, also in four shots had appeared (which possibly inspired M&K).⁵³ This film is further evidence that staged and fake films may have helped to drive forward progress in the development of film style and narrative structure (a point discussed further in my Conclusion).

The staged Boer War films by M&K enjoyed some life after the war, for with the conclusion of the conflict in 1902, the company advertised up to twenty of the films as a series, 'How Tommy Won South Africa'. They proclaimed: 'the War is over and now the country is eager to know how Tommy won South Africa – Our films touch the spot'.⁵⁴ By that point, however, with reconciliation in the air, these films with their implications of Boer perfidy must have seemed somewhat dated.

Hepworth

Hepworth's productions about the war were symbolic representations rather than fakes. The company's two symbolic films of the war have been dealt with in fine style by Strebel, and I will simply summarise her comments, as well as reproduce Hepworth's synopses of the two films (see **Box**), as given in Hepworth's catalogue of 1903 (though I assume the films themselves were produced around 1900).

The catalogue describes one of the films, *The Conjuror and the Boer*, as a patriotic trick film. It opens as a 'typical Boer' much to his disgust, is enveloped in a large Union Jack.⁵⁵ He is thus transformed into a figure of Britannia who hangs up the flag on her trident and waves it back and forth. The camera then closes in on the flag so that it fills the entire screen (a tracking shot?), and the words 'Rule Britannia' appear in large letters at the bottom of the picture. With this the film ended.

As Strebel notes, the Union Jack is hallowed in this and other such films, but enemy flags are reviled. In the other Hepworth film, *Wiping Something off the Slate*, a Boer flag is initially seen waving over a slate on which the word 'Majuba' is written, and then, 'A British soldier tears down the flag, tramples it in disgust, and drenches it in water so that he can wipe the objectionable word from the slate'.⁵⁶ Incidentally, one of the points of stylistic interest in these films was their early use of titles (the films themselves don't survive).

Through Strebel's article these films are well known to film historians, but it has generally been forgotten that, in addition to films, Hepworth (who was from a lantern background) also made a remarkable lantern slide about the war. In fact a large number of lantern slides were produced on the Boer War,

Box:

Hepworth's two symbolic Boer War films

(from Hepwix 1903 catalogue)

no.93. Animated Cartoon: 'Wiping Something off the Slate'

At the opening of this picture clouds of smoke rolling away, reveal the figure of a 'gentleman in kharki' near a huge slate, on which the word 'Majuba' is written, and over which the Boer flag proudly waves. The British soldier tears down this emblem, trampling it underfoot, and goes aside for a moment to fetch some water in his helmet. Then, with the bedraggled, saturated flag, he wipes the offensive word from the slate. He has just finished this, when a shell bursting near, wounds him on the temple. Almost fainting, he yet manages to bind up the wound, pick up his rifle and to take up position at the 'ready,' in the well known pose of 'The Absent-Minded Beggar.' The wound, however, proves too much and he staggers and falls just as the Union Jack floats out behind him, forming a striking background to the picture.

Length 75 ft. Price £1.11.3

no. 94. New 'Trick' Film: 'The Conjuror and the Boer'

This is a patriotic 'trick' film of a very interesting and highly popular nature. A conjuror enters and advancing to the foot-lights, requests a gentleman to come up from the audience, who proves to be a typical Boer. The conjuror then borrows a lady's handkerchief, which he rolls up in his hands for a moment and unfolding it, shows it to be changed into a Union Jack. The small flag then grows in the conjuror's hands until it is sufficient to entirely envelope the Boer, which last operation is performed much to the victim's disgust. A moment after, the big flag is removed, and the Boer is seen to have changed to a figure of Britannia, who rises from the seat, hangs up the flag on her trident and waves it backwards and forwards, so that it covers almost the entire stage. At the same moment, the conjuror transforms himself into a puff of smoke, which rapidly disperses, while the words 'Rule Britannia' appear in large letters all along the bottom of the picture.

Length 75 ft. Price £ 1.11.3⁵⁷

by various manufacturers, and though I won't go into detail on this subject, Hepworth's slide is of sufficient relevance to his film work that it deserves comment.⁵⁸ This special slide depicted the despised President Kruger, who had become a kind of 'man you love to hate' in Britain by this time. It was simply a line drawing of Kruger's portrait on a gelatine slide, which was put into the lantern carrier while it was still wet, and in the heat of the projection light the image melted. This melting slide had quite an impact, and years after he witnessed it a pioneer of the film business, W.N. Blake, remembered seeing it. He recalled: 'the portrait assumed most amusing distortions, as the gelatine gradually melted and he slid from the top of the screen'. As the hated visage melted, a poem about Kruger's ultimate defeat by Queen Victoria was recited:

'There was an old man of Pretoria,
Whose deeds they grew gorier and gorier,
Till there came a big shell,
Which blew him to -- (Bloemfontein),
And now it's reigned o'er by Victoria.'

This unique slide was followed by a Robert Paul film of the Union Jack flying, and together, Blake added, 'the two made a great finish to the show!' Altogether it was 'a wonderful hit, which was administered to every patriotic audience'.⁵⁹

British Gaumont

British Gaumont made two films about the war, and the first of these deserves fuller discussion, for it sparked some controversy, raising the ire of a correspondent to a trade journal. I will quote from his letter in a moment, but first will describe the film which caused him to complain. It was called *Boer Atrocities*, and this title was part of the problem, more than the film itself. The film does not survive, but the trade synopsis (see **Box**) suggest a story which is little different from the fakes made by Paul or M&K, in which heroic self-sacrificing Britons battled treacherous Boers in rather knockabout style. The plot may be summarized as follows: At a mine, guarded by Boers, a British prisoner is found to have a Union Jack, which leads to an argument and the killing of the prisoner. Then another Briton arrives on the scene, sets off an explosion, so killing the Boers though sacrificing himself in the process. The scene then mixes to images of a large Union Jack and the British fleet.

As I say, this does not seem more sensational than fakes from Paul or M&K. The problem was that Gaumont's film was promoted, notably in Gaumont's own publicity, as something more extremely anti-Boer. Perhaps this sensational element in the advertising reflected a public mood. The film was made late in the war, in the latter part of 1901, by which time the British public were sick of the continuing conflict, and accusations of atrocities were flying on both sides. Gaumont's ad in *The Showman* at the end of September stressed:

'Boer Atrocities. Most thrilling war subject, showing British soldier being shot down in cold blood, and another British soldier to the rescue, ending up with Grand Transformation scene. Good photographic quality and most realistic.'⁶⁰

The Showman's reviewer enthused about this film, and stressed its emotive aspects: 'It is the most sensational thing of its kind we have seen, and is calculated to rouse the patriotism of any Britisher.'⁶¹ Gaumont publicised the film, as was their common practice, by issuing a 'special pamphlet'.⁶² I reproduce the text from this Gaumont pamphlet below, along with the synopsis from the *Showman* (September 1901), and it is evident in comparing the two that Gaumont's is more inflammatory, with, for example, the British soldier being 'shot in cold blood', and the Boers 'pleased with their dastardly act'. This caught the eye of one customer, who was so shocked by the description of the film that he wrote to a trade journal, the *Optical Magic*

Lantern Journal, and signed his letter, 'Fairplay and Honesty'. [Fig. 6] The letter appeared in the November issue, including Gaumont's entire synopsis (see **Box**: 2nd synopsis).⁶³ 'Fairplay and Honesty' reacted strongly to Gaumont's synopsis, concluding his letter:

'Perhaps some reader can inform me what good the issue of such films can do? In my opinion the issue of such has only a demoralising tendency for it is false. It is a made-up scene, a playing to the gallery, and a means of instilling hatred in the heart of the young under the guise of what many are pleased to call patriotism. It is to be hoped that films of this character will not find a place in the Englishman's repertoire.'

In retrospect, the behaviour of British Gaumont in promoting this film in such an intemperate manner and in titling it so provocatively, *Boer Atrocities*, is somewhat curious. Curious because the company's chief, Alfred Bromhead, was a rather cosmopolitan figure, bilingual, with close links to the main company in France, where of course audiences were very pro-Boer. On the other hand, probably in this case Bromhead was motivated purely by market forces, keen to exploit the demand among British showmen for anti-Boer films to appeal to jingoistic audiences in fairgrounds, music-halls and the like. But given the complaint, he had probably pitched it wrongly, and it does appear that this film was British Gaumont's sole attempt to 'play to the gallery' in such a manner. The company seems to have produced only one other Boer War acted film, of a very different hue. This was described as 'a representation', entitled *Signing Peace at Pretoria* (surprisingly long at 165 ft.) and was made to celebrate the coming of peace in 1902.⁶⁴ By that time any desire to draw attention to Boer atrocities had passed.

Box:

Gaumont's *Boer Atrocities*

Two descriptions of the film: the neutral trade version, followed by Gaumont's more sensational one.

Synopsis from *The Showman*

The scene is laid at a Transvaal mine, guarded by a sentinel, a Boer commandant being seen in the foreground. Three more Boers appear with a British prisoner, and on finding on his person a Union Jack, get furious, and after a struggle to recover it, the 'Tommy' is shot. The Boers then disperse with the exception of the sentinel. Another 'Tommy', hearing the sound of the shot, crawls up to his dead comrade and covers him with the British flag, which movement catches the eye of the Boer sentinel, who, however, is not quick enough for the Britisher, who fires with deadly effect, which arouses other Boers around; so, quick as a thought, he explodes a box of dynamite, blowing up everything around. When the smoke disperses, a scene of devastation is seen, which gradually is replaced by a set piece representing Britannia with a giant

Union Jack in the background, which is raised, disclosing the British fleet steaming on the ocean. An excellent film, from photographic and topical point of view, and sure to be popular. (*The Showman* 27 Sep 1901, p.36).

Synopsis from Gaumont's pamphlet or circular

The opening of this picture shows a Transvaal mine with a sentinel on guard, and Boer commandant in fore-ground. Three other Boers appear, bringing with them a captured British soldier, whom they search, and find concealed beneath his tunic a Union Jack, the sight of which drives them mad; the commandant seizes the flag, and covers it with abuse. The British soldier, infuriated, attempts to recover it, but in the struggle is thrown to the ground and shot in cold blood. The Boers retire, evidently pleased with their dastardly act, leaving only the sentinel. Another 'Tommy,' attracted by the sounds of firing, crawls on hands and knees to the spot where his comrade lies dead, and perceiving the flag lying by his side, reaches over to it, and reverently lays it on the dead body. He then looks round and observes the sentinel, who turns on hearing his approach; but before he can raise an alarm the Britisher draws a revolver from his belt, and shoots him dead. Seeing that he has aroused the other Boers, he fires his remaining cartridge into a box of dynamite, blowing to atoms everything around. When the smoke clears away a scene of devastation meets the eye, which gradually fades, being replaced by a tableau representing Britannia with a giant Union Jack as background, which gradually rises half way, and shows the British Fleet sailing defiantly on the high seas. (reproduced in 'Boer atrocities', OMLJ, Nov 1901, p.96).

Miscellaneous British producers

It seems that during the Boer War most of the major British film companies made acted films about the conflict. A man who was active in the industry at this time later recalled that fake films of the Boer War (and Spanish-American war) were taken in various areas of England, and he listed these areas as Hempstead [sic] Heath, the Clee, and Fox's Hills of Aldershot.⁶⁵ It is not at all clear which producers would have used these three locations, for none is near any known film producer working at that time, though Hampstead Heath might have tempted any of the London producers.⁶⁶ If films really were made at these places, it implies that there were more Boer fakes made by other filmmakers than we yet know about.

But what of known filmmakers (in addition to those whose work I've already described above)? The Sheffield Photo Company made at least one Boer fake, *Attack on a Convoy*. Frank Mottershaw, the company's producer later recalled that, '...practically the whole of the staff of men and horses of the principal coach and cab proprietors in this town were requisitioned for use in this film'.⁶⁷ Another source, though, suggests that the film was made in co-operation with the Sheffield Fire Brigade who provided men and horses.⁶⁸ Presumably it would have been shot on the neighbouring Yorkshire moors.

Claims have been made that Arthur Melbourne-Cooper's extant film, *Matches Appeal* was produced during the Boer War. But staff at the NFTVA believe

that it is more likely to have been made as a fundraiser during World War 1. Certainly, from what we know of these wars, a film appealing for funds at the time of the Boer War would be surprising, whereas such appeals were fairly routine by the time of the Great War. It has also been suggested that Melbourne-Cooper may also have made fake Boer War films for Charles Urban in Hadley Woods, though no hard evidence for this is forthcoming.⁶⁹

Interestingly, the Brighton filmmakers, G.A. Smith and James Williamson did not manufacture staged Boer War films. As we've seen, G.A. Smith's only real connection with the conflict was in his capacity as technician, developing films of the war, notably those shot by Bennett-Stanford. As for James Williamson, he restricted his Boer themes to two story films made just after the war, in 1902: *The Soldier's Return*, and *A Reservist Before the War, and After the War*. Both of these were about soldiers returning from service in the Boer War.⁷⁰

John Sloane Barnes is not a well known name in early film history, mainly because he only seems to have made one film: a remarkable anti-Kruger film, which survives in the NFTVA. Probably made in March 1900, *A Prize Fight or Glove Fight Between John Bull and President Kruger* is a political pantomime on the Boer War in the form of two rounds of a boxing match.⁷¹ The seconds for Kruger are France and Russia and the second for John Bull is Uncle Sam. Part of the point of the film is to criticize the 'unfair' tactics, as seen by Britain, used by the Boers in this war and so, as Strebel notes, 'In round two Kruger begins to engage in foul play. He kicks John Bull, waves a white flag, and hits Bull from behind while his back is turned.'

A very different anti-Kruger film came from the Warwick Trading Company. Warwick expressed some contempt for 'made-up' subjects, and preferred, as we have seen, to put a major effort into documenting the actual war in South Africa. Nevertheless the company did release a couple of films which, while scarcely fakes, are more than just records of the war. In *Guy Fawkes Day Incident* (5880b), a group of men and boys stab at an effigy of Kruger before igniting it and watching as it is consumed by the flames. The other Warwick film, *Feeding the Boers*, was an even more vituperative attack on the Boer side, which I have mentioned in my introduction.

Imperialistic and pro-British

As Strebel first noticed many years ago, the British acted films of the Boer War are almost all very pro-British and imperialistic in tone. British soldiers are seen as heroes, Boers as skulking and treacherous villains; imperial and national symbols appear in profusion. These messages and images are remarkably consistent across the films produced by the various British film companies which I have covered.

Such a tone was inspired and encouraged by the general chauvinism in the air at the time: this in an age when the term 'imperialist' was a compliment, not an insult. With the notable exception of the protest letter about the Gaumont film, noted above, there seems to have been little criticism of these films at the

time, for they were presumably seen as celebrating the national war effort for Britain and the Empire.

STAGED FILMS MADE IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Throughout the Boer War, the majority of nations and people in the world sided with the Boers, and few supported Britain. Of course the British Empire was loyal (though some pro-Boer views were expressed even there), but on the European Continent the opinion was almost universally in favour of the Boers, and one would have been hard pressed to find anyone to stand up for Britain. In the United States the opinion was at best divided.

Given this generally anti-British opinion (even though other nations did not officially fight for the Boers) one might expect the staged films of the war made outside Britain to be very pro-Boer, just as the British equivalents were anti-Boer. In fact, however, they were in general more balanced and moderate than their British opposite numbers, certainly this being the case with those films made in France by Pathé, and the Edison titles made in the USA, though the single example we shall encounter from the Netherlands was certainly very pro Boer.

These differences in tone seem to be linked to differences in the type of film produced. While the Pathé and Edison companies mainly produced fakes (acted battlefield incidents), and these had a balanced tone, many of the British-made staged films and the single Netherlands film were symbolic representations, which had a propaganda message. In short, the faked battlefield incident mode does seem to be less associated with propaganda than the symbolic scene. As some explanation for this difference, one might say that a fake film was always trying to stay within the bounds of the vaguely possible, albeit depicting one-off chauvinistic incidents, whereas in a symbolic film there were no limits to the nationalistic excesses.

In what follows I will describe these non British-produced films in more detail, covering the films in question country by country, and then company by company.

France: the Pathé fakes

Most of the fake films of the Boer war made in France were produced by the well established Pathé company. Pathé made at least eleven fakes of the Boer War, which were listed in the company's catalogue: eight at first, probably in the Autumn of 1899, and then another three sometime after January 1900.⁷² [Fig. 8: Pathé's British catalogue]

Pathé must have shot some of its fakes as early as October or November 1899 because at least two of them were on sale through a British distributor, Fuerst brothers, by late November.⁷³ This makes Pathé one of the first companies to produce Boer fakes. By the end of the year the Fuerst company was distributing four of the films, which they described as 'Episodes of the War in the Transvaal' (the word 'episodes' indicating that these were story

films, fakes, and not actualities from the front).⁷⁴ And by this time and probably earlier, five of the titles were on sale in France.⁷⁵

Pathé made a second batch of three Boer War fakes some time after the end of January. That they were made later than the others with a production break between is suggested by the different catalogue numbering system that they employ.⁷⁶ Also, one of the films, and probably two, were representations of the Battle of Spion Kop which took place 24 January 1900, so obviously the films were made after that.

Unfortunately we know all too little about the production of these Pathé fakes. As some indication of this, we don't even know who the director was, though there are suggestions that one or both of the Pathé stalwarts, Ferdinand Zecca or Lucien Nonguet, might have been involved.⁷⁷ There are a few further details: a writer in early 1900 noted that the first Boer fakes, presumably meaning the Pathé ones, were taken outside Paris using 'supers' from a Paris theatre.⁷⁸ Another writer stated that some Boer War fakes came from a Paris factory, 'which had in its employment for some weeks a small Boer commando and a detachment of British troops, all of them Frenchmen'.⁷⁹ This is as much as we know about the personnel. But where exactly in Paris were they made? I believe it was in Buttes Chaumont park in the northeast of Paris. Some doubts have been expressed by historians about this location, so I will try to explain my evidence fully. In mid November 1899 the periodical *South Africa* reported:

'The persons who happened to be in the Buttes-Chaumont Park the other afternoon were astonished to see a group of English soldiers occupying the top of a knoll. The men were ranged as if expecting an attack, some of them placed as advance sentinels, others taking advantage of the cover afforded by trees, and the remainder ranged in firing order along the crest of the slight eminence. Presently a "commando" of Boers surged out from below, opened fire on the English, and proceeded to storm the hill. For a moment the spectators were inclined to wonder whether the English and Dutch residents in Paris had decided to settle their differences by mortal combat. In any case, what was afoot was sufficiently mysterious until the truth was explained.'⁸⁰

This 'truth', *South Africa* continued, was that the editor of 'a Paris illustrated paper' had decided that because 'genuine photographs of this kind would naturally be difficult to obtain', he had,

'...hit on the idea of dressing up a number of theatrical "supers" as English and Boers, of making them go through a series of military operations, and of having photographs taken of the scenes thus contrived'.⁸¹

The article twice uses the word 'photographs', and a phrase, 'Kodak reproductions', and claims that these scenes were done for 'a Paris illustrated paper'. Yet despite this indication of still photographs, I am nevertheless

inclined to think that this might be a garbled reference to production of the Pathé films, for the following reasons. For a start, I have as yet not found such faked photographs reproduced in any periodical of late 1899.⁸² Secondly, in this era the two media, stills and film, were often conflated (films were often called ‘animated photographs’). Thirdly, the description of the action is consistent with one of the Pathé fake films (possibly *Boers Take Up the Offensive*, or *Capture of a Gun by the Boers*), as mentioned in synopses below. Finally, the fact that they were taken at Buttes Chaumont is significant, for my other sources suggest that fake films were made in this park.⁸³

On the latter point: Another contemporary reference to film fakes being made in Buttes-Chaumont park comes in a fictional account from February 1900, which derides the ‘actors’ playing their ‘bad pantomime’ of the South African War in this park.⁸⁴ In addition, several later sources also state that Boer War fakes were made in this park. A newspaper article of June 1902 about film faking notes that Buttes-Chaumont had been used as the location for several fake films, including one about Boers attacking a hill in the Transvaal.⁸⁵ About the same date, a French correspondent to a British photographic journal stated that films of the Boer war,

‘...were all, or most of them, taken at Paris, France, at the Park “des Buttes Chaumonts,” where some Apaches (as they are called in that quarter), were successfully trained to play the enemy in the bushes and mountains.’⁸⁶

A few years later still, one of the pioneers of the French film industry, Victorin Jasset, noted in passing that, ‘The neighbourhood of Buttes-Chaumont still recalls the stampede of old nags ridden by the defeated British army fleeing from the victorious Boers’.⁸⁷ While it is possible that these sources were all basing their statements on hearsay, I somehow doubt it.

But there is one problem with concluding that Pathé filmed scenes in Buttes-Chaumont, which is that the company was not located in that part of Paris. Pathé’s headquarters was in Vincennes and one might think they could have filmed in park areas around there more conveniently, notably in the Bois de Vincennes.⁸⁸ Buttes-Chaumont on the other hand was near to where the rival company, Gaumont had its offices (and its first studio and lab). Could the stories of filming be referring to Gaumont? Unlikely, for there is no evidence that Gaumont made any fakes of the Boer War, nor indeed that other Paris-based film companies did so, while there is irrefutable catalogue evidence that Pathé produced such fakes.

My conclusion is that it was indeed Pathé’s staff who were filming Boer fakes in Buttes-Chaumont. Why they should travel to film there, just next to their rivals, is anybody’s guess. Perhaps it was partly a question of permission to film, and the authorities of this park would allow it while others wouldn’t? There might have been another reason too. Buttes-Chaumont park was established partly in the site of a former quarry, and images of it show that it retains a rocky, somewhat wild and hilly appearance. [Fig. 7] The Bois de Vincennes on the other hand is a more ‘placid’ garden, in the English

landscape manner, with gently rolling hills and lakes. The people at Pathé might have thought that Buttes-Chaumont's rocks more closely matched what they knew of South Africa. The surviving films (or frames from them) do suggest that some scenes were filmed in rocky surroundings, and the synopses mention hills.⁸⁹ What's more, the trip from Pathé's offices in Vincennes to Buttes-Chaumont is hardly far: a mere five kilometres north.⁹⁰

While Boer War fakes were made in several different countries, it seems there was a prejudice in Britain that most were made in France, and presented an anti-British point of view. A poem of August 1900 by Ward Muir, 'The khaki-covered camera', expresses this feeling. Its subject is some filmmakers who've 'rented a secluded park not far from gay Paree', as a place to make Boer War fakes.⁹¹ Muir writes:

'Their methods, though dramatic, are a little bit erratic,
For they can't resist the joy of making British soldiers flee !'

Muir continues by lampooning the sheer mendacity of such films: 'As a fabrication-mill it is the greatest thing', he writes, adding that the cinematograph is capable of 'Two hundred lies a minute!...' The implication is that such films presented a distorted and biased view of Britain's effort in the war, and were pro-Boer. Interestingly, though, as far as the Pathé films were concerned, this perception was wrong, for, unpredictably, these films did not present a generally anti-British sentiment, and were fairly balanced. A close reading of the synopses suggests that about half of the eleven titles represent what are in some sense British victories. Take the sixth episode, *Boer Position Taken Near Mafeking*. The catalogue sums this up as follows (my translation):

'The Boers have set up a battery on a hill near Mafeking. This is giving the British severe trouble, so the latter send a unit out of the besieged town, and after an artillery duel and very lively gun fire, seize the position; the Boers withdraw, taking their wounded and their artillery pieces.'

Or in film number 11, *Explosion of a Mine*, the British protagonist manages to wipe out his Boer enemies, and *A Skirmish Near Glencoe* has the British defeating at least a dozen Boer fighters. On the other hand, film number 3, *Capture of a Gun by the Boers*, has the reverse outcome:

'A British artillery battery set on a hillock is captured during an attack by a Boer unit, after fierce fighting by both sides. An artillery piece falls into the hands of the Boers who take it away.'

This balance is maintained across the whole series of films, with both British and Boer successes/defeats being portrayed. Some titles are neither victories nor defeats for either side: for example, in the first two spy films, the Boer spy ends up being executed but gains glory in death, a very ambiguous outcome. What is also noticeable is the fairly measured tone in these films (or in the summaries, at least). There are none of the suggestions of treachery and atrocities that one finds in the British fakes, none of the propaganda. Yet this

was at a time when most French people were fervently pro-Boer, and when there was a widespread anti-British feeling in France. In other words, Pathé took a surprisingly impartial approach.

This rather 'measured' attitude is reflected in the catalogue wording. Significantly, the Pathé catalogue headed its listing of these films, 'Épisodes relatifs à la guerre du Transvaal, scènes d'actualités'. That is, 'Episodes about the Transvaal war: scenes of current events'. This is admirably precise language, which is telling us that while these are 'episodes', or stories (not genuine filmed events), nevertheless they are meant to depict 'current events' in some fairly truthful manner.

In some cases Pathé even seemed to go out of its way to portray British military successes. A couple of examples of this occur in surviving films.⁹² Film number 9 is *Episode During the Battle of Spion Kop*. The battle of Spion Kop was possibly the worst British defeat of the war, with over 1300 casualties. Yet the Pathé film shows a British success, with the Tommies managing to place their artillery on the summit of a hill. In actual fact this did not happen, and the British abandoned the hill under fire. So in presenting this British fiasco in any kind of positive light, shows that Pathé were not being as pro-Boer as one might expect.

Another film also is extant, and again is not pro-Boer. Interestingly this was not listed in the Pathé catalogue (neither in the 'Transvaal War' section nor elsewhere). It portrays the surrender of an officer, probably meant to represent General Cronjé. The real Cronjé surrendered with his men on 27 February 1900, a major victory for the British and a very humiliating moment for the Boer side.⁹³ Why would Pathé choose to portray this moment of British triumph? I suggest that the film was not made for general sale (and not in France) and this might explain why it did not appear in Pathé's catalogue, for perhaps it was for restricted circulation only.⁹⁴ It would certainly have enjoyed its greatest popularity in Britain, and maybe it was made primarily for the British market, which was very important to Pathé at this time.

The importance of international markets could help to explain the characteristic which I have discussed above: that Pathé made its films in a relatively dispassionate rather than propagandistic style. By rejecting a tone of Boer triumphalism, the company was ensuring a wider distribution for these scenes, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world. By depicting the British winning in several films, and keeping a generally 'cool' tone, this would help to ensure that the films could be sold in Britain and in English-speaking territories as well as elsewhere, and not antagonise any audiences.

There are a couple of small differences between synopses of the Pathé fakes in the British and French catalogue which would have helped make the films more appropriate to the different national audiences. Such catalogue descriptions were important, for they affected the meanings of films. An English summary of film 5 states that it ends with 'a glorious victory' for the English. On the other hand, for film number 8, the French summary

concludes, 'Finally the British are driven off with serious losses', a comment which is not in the British synopsis.

Box:

The Pathé Boer War fakes: 'Episodes of the Transvaal War'

Notes:

This series is also known as 'Episodes of the War in the Transvaal', and in the original French as 'Épisodes relatifs à la guerre du Transvaal: scènes d'actualités'. Film numbers which I use here, 1 to 11, are the same as those assigned by Bousquet. Pathé's original catalogue numbers are given in square brackets: the first is the British catalogue number, the second is the French. The first film title I give is from the British Pathé catalogue of 1903, followed by any alternative titles, including the French originals. *An asterisk means the film is extant.

The synopses are mainly my translations of Bousquet's French summaries, or, where available, original English language summaries (with source indicated). If an English language summary adds any important details to the translated French catalogue version, or vice versa, I add this information in round brackets.

The films:

1. [521/550] *Capture of a Boer Spy / Arrest of a Boer Spy / Arrestation d'un Espion Boër* (65 ft, 20m) – An English Column are resting (in their tents) near Mafeking after an attack upon the Boers. (Guards watch over the camp.) Suddenly a patrol of British soldiers advances towards the camp and are stopped by a guard. Among them is a spy who, when brought up and searched before the officers, is found to be in possession of some plans; he is taken to the front of the camp, an officer rises and commands a company of men to take him off for execution; the men fall into line and leave with the officer. (BJP 5.1.00)
2. [522/551] *Execution of the same / Son Exécution / The Execution of the Boer Spy / The Shooting of the Boer Spy by the English* (50 ft, 15m) – On arriving at the place of execution the spy (stands bravely before the English guns and) is immediately shot; he dies heroically, defying the enemies of his country. (BJP 5.1.00)⁹⁵
3. [523/552] *Capture of a Gun by the Boers / Attaque d'une Batterie Anglaise par les Boers; Prise d'un Canon* (65 ft, 20m) – A British artillery battery set on a hillock is captured during an attack by a Boer unit after fierce fighting by both sides. An artillery piece falls into the hands of the Boers who take it away.
- *4. [524/553] *A Skirmish at Glencoe and Repulse of the Boers / A Skirmish near Glencoe / Une Escarmouche près de Glencoë* (65 ft, 20m) – A detachment of Boers, trying to pass the English outposts, is surprised by a strong English detachment, who, reinforced by two cannons, repulse the Boers, leaving twelve of the enemy (about 15, says the French version) slain on the field.⁹⁶ (BJP 5.1.00)
5. [525/554] *Assault on a Hill at Glencoe / Assaut d'une Colline près de Glencoë* (65 ft, 20m) – A Boer unit comes to take up a position at Dundee Hill; but an English battalion preceded it and occupies the hill, and another battalion has got around the Boers and cuts off their retreat. Desperate, the Boers attack, but their efforts are in vain; and those who aren't shot are taken prisoner. (An English summary states:

‘a view of the English Battery attacked by the Boers, resulting in a glorious victory for the former’. PD 01.12.99)

6. [526/555] *Boer Position Taken Near Mafeking / Prise d'une Position Boër près de Mafeking* (50 ft, 15m) – The Boers have set up a battery on a hill near Mafeking. This is giving the British severe trouble, so the latter send a unit out of the besieged town, and after an artillery duel and very lively gun fire, seize the position; the Boers withdraw, taking their wounded and their artillery pieces.
7. [527/556] *Capture of Guns on the Tugela by the Boers, one bursting / Les Boërs s'emparent d'un Canon Anglais / Explosion d'un Canon* (65 ft, 20m) – This takes place during a battle at the Tugela river. After some heavy gunfire, the Boers manage to dislodge the British from their positions, seizing their artillery pieces, one of which explodes, though without causing much injury to the victorious Boers.
8. [528/557] *Episode During the Battle of Modder River / Episodes of the Modder River Battles / Épisode de la Bataille de Modder-River* (50 ft, 15m) – The Boers seize some English cannon, one of which explodes without, however, doing much damage among the victorious Boers. (The battle is so fierce, and the gunfire so heavy that) the Boer women load the guns and pass them on to the Burghers. Severe fighting and heavy losses. (Finally the British are driven off with serious losses.) (BJP 5.1.00) [There seems to be some repetition here, between films 7 and 8.]
- *9. [529] *Episode During the Battle of Spion Kop / Épisode de la Bataille de Spion-Kop* (65 ft, 20m) – The British, understanding the importance of this strategic point, decide to place their artillery on the summit of the hill. After great efforts they succeed in placing and unlimbering their big guns on one of the main hilltops.
10. [530] *Boers Take Up the Offensive / Les Boërs Prennent l'Offensive* (65 ft, 20m) – The Boers try to drive off the British and a bloody battle begins. The gunfire rages while a large number of men and artillery pieces move around on the slopes of the mountain.
11. [538] *Explosion of a Mine / Une Explosion* (65 ft, 20m) 538 – To avenge the death of his commander an English soldier lights a box of explosives and so wipes out the advance parties of enemy [Boer] troops.
- * [12. A print of a film, apparently also by Pathé, portraying the surrender of a Boer officer, has been discovered, though it is not listed in the Pathé catalogue. See my main text.]

Sources: Henri Bousquet, *Catalogue Pathé des Années 1896 à 1914: Vol 1, 1896-1906* (Bures sur Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1996), p.848-49 and p.858. Bousquet's information on these Boer films comes largely from the French Pathé catalogues of March 1902 and August 1904, plus the British Pathé catalogue of 1903, p.61. The latter dates from May 1903, says Bousquet, and is reproduced on the microfilm, *Early Rare British Filmmakers' Catalogues, 1896-1913*. Further details come from 'Up-to-date films', PD 1 Dec 1899, p.144; and Fuerst's list, BJP Suppl., 5 Jan 1900, p.8.

Such variations were sometime relayed to audiences. I have come across a couple of anecdotes in which the sense of some of these Pathé films was changed through varying their descriptions (both examples come from British sources in 1900). In the first of these, a certain 'Parisian photographer' was reported to have engaged some 'supers' (i.e. extras), then costumed them,

and made a Boer War film with the necessary action, smoke etc. He described the film either as 'The Boers driving back the British' or 'the British beating off the Boers', varying this description, 'according to the pro- or anti-Boer sympathies of his audience'.⁹⁷

Another piece of mis-description was also reported at this time, with films of 'Boers' being cheered in Paris, when it seems they were actually shots of New Zealanders!⁹⁸ Presumably the showman was responsible for this subterfuge. As we have seen for other wars, re-titling was the quickest and easiest means of 'faking', thereby making films more saleable than they might otherwise be. The only requirement was an audience which was sufficiently ignorant not to know the difference between the look of Boer, British or New Zealand troops.

Other French fakes

It would be true to say that Pathé almost monopolised the field of Boer fake production in France. The only non-Pathé examples that I have found are based on vague and unreliable reports (as is so common in early film history). Nonetheless they are sufficiently interesting to deserve mentioning. One of these is of especial interest because, if true, it would be the first fake of the Boer War made anywhere, produced only days after the start of hostilities. It was allegedly a fake of virtually the first incident of the war, when the Boers attacked a British armoured train en route to Mafeking on 12 October 1899. The fake of this event was reported in only one source that I have managed to find: in a British music hall journal at the end of October. This stated that within a week of the attack, copies of a 'correct reproduction' in animated photographs of the incident 'were on sale in Paris and found their way over here', and 'have already been shown in the provinces'.⁹⁹ I have found no more references to such a film, and no catalogue descriptions matching these details, so perhaps the 'reproduction' was only a lantern slide, or this anecdote may have been nothing but rumour.

The same applies to another alleged example of film fakery from France. This comes from the recollections of famous French western star, Joë Hamman. Hamman remembered filming a fake Boer war film close to Fontvieille in Provence (in the massif, a landscape presumed to match the kopjes of South Africa). The production featured about sixty workers from nearby Arles to play the troops. Specifically Hamman remembered that, in order to increase the realism of the scene, they placed dead horses on the 'battlefield' from an Arles abattoir.¹⁰⁰

The Netherlands: Nöggerath's film

The populations of the Netherlands and Belgium were fervently pro-Boer at this time, and their media (stage shows, etc) dealt with the conflict with matching passion. I will deal with this subject, and with film exhibition, in the next chapter. But as for film production, it seems that, somewhat surprisingly, only one acted film about the Boer War was actually produced in these countries. The details are somewhat sketchy, though as much as can be discovered has been unearthed by the late Geoffrey Donaldson, and the following is a summary of information from Donaldson's various sources.¹⁰¹

The film in question was made by Franz Anton Nöggerath (1859-1908), who owned a music hall, Flora Variété Theatre in Amstelstraat, Amsterdam. After films had been shown there from 1896 to 1897, he and his son Franz Anton Junior (1880-1947) decided to take up cinematography themselves. By 1899 they had begun production, and in November of that year were said to be making Boer War fakes. This was claimed in a brief note published in a magazine, which stated that Transvaal pictures were being staged for the bioscope in a studio on the roof of Nöggerath's Flora theatre. It added, interestingly, 'Mr Nöggerath certainly thinks that the world wants to be deceived.'¹⁰² (Here, as elsewhere at this time, the assumption is that war is faked or restaged on film in order to deceive rather than merely to illustrate).

Further evidence of this fake film production comes from L.J. Jordaan, one of the earliest and most respected Dutch film critics (born 1885). He recalled in a book published in 1958 that, together with his father and grand-father, he saw a film about the Boer War at the time.¹⁰³ He described how a scene depicting bearded Boers, with guns at their hips and seated on horses, excited him, 'even though the background looked suspiciously like the Kalfjeslaan'. (The Kalfjeslaan was an avenue on the outskirts of Amsterdam, which at the turn of the century was still rural).

Based on these details therefore, the films were shot in two locations: on the theatre roof and just outside Amsterdam. It seems that the roof material was mainly shots of an actor portraying Paul Kruger (possibly Barend Barendse).¹⁰⁴ The exteriors were presumably scenes to give the impression that the action was taking place in distant South Africa. The resulting films, or some of them, were premiered at the Flora on 10 November, so that they must have been shot at the latest about the beginning of the month. This is very early, less than a month after the outbreak of hostilities, and means that Nöggerath's film fakes were some of the first to be produced during the Boer War.

The films were presented in the context of a stage show (such a combination of film and live performance became a trend in Holland), the theme of which was basically a glorification of President Kruger. A newspaper review on 11 November described the mixed-media nature of this show in the Flora. After a live act which ended with the flourishing of the Transvaal and Dutch flags, the films followed. The critic wrote:

'We waved with our hats, sang along and called back the Schmidt trio [one of the live acts]. The same again with the bioscope, which showed pleasant pictures from the Transvaal: Paul Kruger in four different attitudes, once with his head against the blue sky.'¹⁰⁵

While these films were shown, couplets about the Transvaal were declaimed by actors, Mr and Mrs Paulus. Then followed more live material on stage in the form of an 'Apotheosis' in which three wounded English soldiers, supported by Red Cross nurses, were lying on the ground in the foreground. Around them were grouped lifelike Boers, while an Angel appeared to

descend from Heaven and offered Paul Kruger a laurel wreath. Kruger shook hands with a wounded Boer.

It is not clear if the exterior-shot films were shown in these Flora performances as well as the four Kruger shots, but there were apparently outdoor scenes in a possibly longer version which was presented on 24 December in the Paleis voor Volksvlijt (also in Amsterdam). The films here were part of a live play about Kruger, called *Oom Paul, of de Vrijheidsoorlog* (Uncle Paul, or the War of Independence), written by Alex Benno, which again featured actor Barend Barendse as Kruger. A press ad states that the films shown during the production were arranged by Nöggerath.¹⁰⁶

This is as much as we know about the Nöggerath fake films of the Boer War.¹⁰⁷ The films are interesting historically partly because of the mixed-media context, whereby they were presented within the live performance of a stage show. They are also notable in offering parallels with British Boer War fakes, which also made use of the tableau format, with its heavy use of symbolism and veneration of national heroes. The difference, of course, is that here the theme was a glorification of President Kruger – in marked contrast to the vilification the President was receiving in the British media. In this sense, the Nöggerath films provide a small mirror image of the British fakes, each presenting its own extreme position on the Kruger question, and demonstrating again that film propaganda – and propaganda from two opposing viewpoints – was born within the very first years of cinema.

The United States: Edison's New Jersey fakes

There were two American producers of Boer War fakes: the Edison and the Lubin companies, while Vitagraph merely distributed some titles. Edison had followed Lubin into this area of staging war re-enactments from 1898, and by the time of the Boer War were well rehearsed in the genre. Their production of Boer fakes is well documented, far more so than Lubin's.

In the Spring of 1900 Edison made seven Boer War fakes, in two batches, all shot in the Orange Mountains in New Jersey.¹⁰⁸ [Fig. 9] About 200 men were employed as performers, about half of them playing Boers and the other half British troops.¹⁰⁹ The production process was not without upsets, with the disaffected actors demanding a pay rise at one stage, and worse was to come. On 11 April director James H. White was filming the first few subjects, including *Boers Bringing in British Prisoners* and *Charge of Boer Cavalry*, but while filming *Capture of Boer Battery*, the cannon fired prematurely and two men including White were injured, the director being badly lacerated and burned.¹¹⁰ But, despite his mishap, a few days later he was back to complete the series, joined now by Mason Mitchell, an actor and veteran of the Spanish-American War, to help organize the battle scenes.

The three films just mentioned were advertised and described at the end of April, headlined 'Realistic Boer Pictures', and this source added that four further Boer War films were now ready.¹¹¹ Two weeks later these additional four titles (presumably the films which Mitchell had worked on after the accident) were advertised in the *New York Clipper*.¹¹²

All of the films were copyrighted, and so paper print versions survive.¹¹³ The films are interesting both in terms of content and style. Each title is shot from a single position, and shows various incidents, as opposing groups of troops battle and chase one another across the hilly landscape. To anyone who knows anything about the Boer War, the lack of authenticity is striking. The 'Boers' are wearing uniforms, said to be khaki, but which look more like the uniforms worn by northern soldiers in the US Civil War ! (They came from a theatrical costumier).¹¹⁴ In reality Boer fighters rarely wore uniforms of any kind, being typical guerrillas, riding the family horse and fighting in the clothes in which they farmed. One detail Edison's men did get right: the 'Boers' were provided with false beards (which kept falling off, according to one article of the time), and as photographs taken during the war prove, many Boers really did have beards, especially the older men.

Edison's portrayal of Boer tactics is as laughable as the uniforms. Whereas in the real war the Boers used up-to-date rifles (Kruger had cannily ordered thousands of Mausers before the war) in the Edison films they are armed with swords. In *Charge of Boer Cavalry* they wave these weapons in the air as they charge up a slope, and are also seen brandishing them in *Boers Bringing in British Prisoners*. As in other early fakes, the guns emit huge volumes of gun-smoke (e.g. in *English Lancers Charging at Modder River*): this in an era when smokeless powder was becoming the norm.

But apart from this lack of the correct details, in other respects the action is not unrealistic. David Levy writes that these films are 'remarkable for the choice of angle and camera positions', with unusually early use of movement in depth, as performers come past close to camera – giving the scenes a certain realistic quality. He finds, too, some restraint in acting (apart from an occasional grin which breaks through), and he concludes that the films,

'...were clearly the deliberate result of an equally deliberate analysis. Whoever did them possessed a fine sense, not only of the features of the newsreel look, but also of how to achieve a credible stylized facsimile.'¹¹⁵

I think that Levy rather overstates his case, but the movement in depth is indeed more typical of early actualities than dramas (which tended to place actors on a stage at a fixed distance from the camera) and thus this shooting style does signal actuality. Another noteworthy point about these Edison fakes is that they are more measured in tone than the British fakes – in this respect more like the Pathé series – for while most of the Edison films show the Boers winning, some are more neutral, and one title, *Capture of Boer Battery*, actually has the British troops (Highlanders) defeating the Boers. ('They sweep all before them, leaving the guns smoking and deserted as they pursue the flying Boers', states the catalogue.)

Whoever wins, there is no attempt to demonise one or the other for fighting unfairly or treacherously (as in the British fakes): one side simply wins and the other loses. The only noticeable bias, and this very marginal, comes in the

catalogue in the form of comments that, for example, the British prisoners look 'very dejected', or that a film of English Lancers being repulsed is 'very stirring'. This relatively dispassionate approach may well have been informed by the fact that the American public was divided in its attitude to this war, and Edison's producers were reflecting this varied and non-polarised opinion. This would also be a sensible strategy in order to appeal to all world markets, both the pro-Boer and the pro-British, and though I cannot establish how widely these fake films were distributed outside the USA, one of them, *Capture of Boer Battery*, may well have been screened in the UK (see second **Box** below). This scene had the British winning, and the anecdote suggests that exhibitors would pick and choose these films so as to show only those which would appeal to their spectators (who obviously wouldn't want to see the Boers winning).

Box:

Edison fake films of the Boer War

Titles, descriptions and footages are from an Edison ad, headed: 'New Boer Pictures', *NY Clipper*, 12 May 1900, p.260.¹¹⁶

Charge of Boer Cavalry (50ft.) Shows a wild charge of mounted Boers up a steep hill.

The action of the picture is spirited, and photographically, it is an excellent film. The opening scene shows a bleak hillside with the Boer cavalry in the distance, galloping rapidly to the front. They cross the crest of the ridge just as the film ends. [Two versions of this were copyrighted.]

Capture of Boer Battery (100ft.) By the Gordon Highlanders. In the foreground are two Creusot guns, manned by the Dutch burghers. Smoke effects are fine. The highlanders are seen in the distance, approaching rapidly, easily distinguished by their kilts and bare legs. They sweep all before them, leaving the guns smoking and deserted as they pursue the flying Boers. [What seems like a second take of this was copyrighted as *Capture of Boer Battery by the British*.]

Boers Bringing in British Prisoners (75ft.) Boers are on horseback, and pass over the kop in slow marching order with their prisoners, who trudge along on foot, looking very dejected.

English Lancers Charging at Modder River (75ft.) This scene shows the British Infantry and cavalry attacking the Boers and being repulsed. Very stirring.

Boer Commissary Train Trekking (25ft.) Shows a Boer supply wagon train escorted by cavalry marching down a mountain road.

Red Cross Ambulance on the Battle Field (100ft.) Shows an ambulance drawn by two spirited horses galloping across the field, escorted by Red Cross nurses, who pick up the dead and wounded of both Boer and British, and carry them off.

Battle of Mafeking (75ft.) This scene shows the Boers attacking the British; and after surrounding and killing the greatest part of them, they capture the remainder.

Box:

Recollection of a fake film of the Boer War

From: Edmund Cousins, *Filmland in Ferment*, 1932.¹¹⁷

In this passage Edmund Cousins recalls seeing a Boer War fake in the summer of 1900 when he was a child, along with a fake of the Boxer uprising (also claimed as authentic). It seems from his description that the Boer film may have been one of the Edison fakes, *Capture of Boer Battery*. (This is the film, mentioned above, which has the British Highlanders vanquishing the Boers). He notes that it depicted the fighting in South Africa, and had apparently been shot in an area of parkland. He writes:

'...one helmeted and accoutred British scout after another walked incautiously up a grassy slope, only to be shot or clubbed by a handful of Boers in slouch hats and black synthetic beards, who popped over the crest like jack-in-the-box. At last a force of British troops, which could hardly have been a man under eight strong, stormed the position at the point of the bayonet amid the fervent patriotic cheers of the audience; and when the gas jets in the hall were turned up they shone on faces transfigured by a great and glorifying experience. "One of those soldiers was killed twice," complained my brother, aged twelve. "I knew him by his short legs."

There are a number of points here which lead me to think that this might be referring to the aforementioned Edison film. The size of the force roughly matches what one sees in the Edison films; the 'black synthetic beards' of the Boers are akin to those false beards alluded to above; and the 'short legs' of one of the British attackers would have been especially noticeable, as these were Scots troops, 'easily distinguished by their kilts and bare legs', as the Edison catalogue put it.

Lubin: the Pitrot film

We know far less about Lubin's productions on the Boer War than Edison's, but the company was certainly capable of this kind of work. Charles Musser notes that Lubin's film productions had reached a considerable level of sophistication by 1899, and the company had a studio in which it made acted films, notably re-creations of war incidents and boxing matches, Musser tells us.

When the Boer War was in full swing, at about the same time as the rival Edison company was making its war fakes, the Lubin company apparently decided that they must have something of this kind too. My suspicion is that they opted for a dual-track strategy, and bought in some films while also shooting their own specially-made tableaux of the war. Lubin certainly released some kind of Boer War subjects, as he advertised these in an American entertainment weekly. One Lubin ad appeared on 21 April 1900 for something called 'Boer War Film', a 450 foot production.¹¹⁸ Lubin published another ad in mid May, stating that 'new Boer War films now ready'.¹¹⁹ [Fig. 10]

So clearly Lubin had some kind of Boer films to release, but until recently the evidence that the company made acted films about the war has been slim. However I have now found a brief reference which suggests that at least one made-up film on this subject was indeed produced. My evidence comes from an intriguing short letter which is quoted in a British music-hall periodical in mid 1900. Dated 2 June, the letter was sent to the periodical by a certain Richard Pitrot, then in Philadelphia. Pitrot was evidently an actor, and probably British. He informed the readership that he had just come back from the Lubin 'factory' in the city, where he had:

'...posed for Mr. Lubin as the Queen, as General Roberts, Paul Kruger, Salisbury, Gladstone, and McKinley. Mr. Lubin received telegraphic orders from all over the country for these pictures, which are certainly among the most clever ever produced.'¹²⁰

This is the only information I have on these films, but one can deduce a few probabilities from this letter. The cast of characters, including two Boer War-related figures, Roberts and Kruger, proves that this refers to a Boer War subject or subjects. The fact that there was such an array of characters, both male and female, all played by this male actor, suggests that the film or films being made were quite 'broad', in a music hall or pantomime tradition. I suspect that these various political figures might have featured in the manner of the previously mentioned British symbolic film by Barnes, *A Prize Fight...Between John Bull and President Kruger*. Pitrot calls these Lubin films in which he'd appeared, 'most clever', and this word 'clever' suggests to me that this/these might have been trick films.

When were these Lubin pantomime film(s) released? I have mentioned some Lubin press ads for the so-called 'Boer War Film', but I doubt that these refer to the Pitrot film, partly because the ads are too early: Pitrot states on 2 June that he had 'just come from a visit to the Lubin factory', which implies that he had been before the cameras only a few days earlier, say in May. The films therefore would not have been ready in April or even, probably, by mid May, whereas the 'Boer War Film' was advertised on 21 April. Furthermore the latter was very long at 450 ft., longer than any standard pantomime subject. My suspicion therefore is that the 'Boer War Film' was something else, probably a medley of existing Boer War films, foreign-made actualities in the main, bought in from other producers. But at the end of June Lubin advertised a new title, 'South African War Subjects', which might have included Pitrot's pantomime film (if indeed this film was ever advertised).¹²¹

Given the intensive research which has been done on early American cinema, it might seem somewhat surprising that we know so little about Lubin's Boer War films. Perhaps one reason for this lack of information is that these productions were being filmed at a time of patent disputes with Edison, leading to a general air of secrecy. Probably Lubin himself would have kept rather quiet about what he was doing, and, for example, wouldn't have wanted a reporter coming to do a story on his film 'factory'; so we are lucky indeed that an actor, Pitrot, managed to sneak this brief account of his work out of the studio and into the British press. Another possible reason that Lubin's Boer

War fakes have been neglected is that they may have been destroyed in a studio fire.¹²²

Apparently, the only other American company which claimed to make Boer War fakes was Vitagraph. While I believe that these were bought-in productions made by other companies, not Vitagraph, I append the list in any case (see **Box**), as an interesting addition to this subject of non-British Boer War films.

Box:

Vitagraph's five fake Boer War films

(from Vitagraph's 'New Boer War films', 1900)

In Vitagraph's *List of New Films* of 1900, a section of titles is headed, 'New Boer War films'. While over thirty of these are actualities, including some from South Africa (not filmed by Vitagraph, I might add, but bought in), five are listed as 'faked or pre-arranged war subjects'.¹²³ The catalogue states that these views 'were specially posed for at an open-air military tournament in England by British infantry and cavalrymen – the most realistic and exciting war pictures of the age'. While it is just possible that Vitagraph did film at a tournament in England, it would be an ambitious undertaking for a start-up company based in the USA. Another claim came from Terry Ramsaye, who stated that Vitagraph made some Boer War fakes on Long Island.¹²⁴ Much more likely than either, I'd suggest, is that Vitagraph simply bought these films in from another company or companies, and sure enough, some of the details given do match known productions from other companies.¹²⁵ Among these five films, some seem pro and some seem anti British, which is similar to the balanced, even-handed approach that we find in the Edison corpus.

- 235. *Repulse of the Boers at Magersfontein by the Royal Dublin Fusiliers* – showing charge of the Irish Regiments and the Ambulance Corps in action. 75 and 100 ft.
- 236. *Capture of a Boer Maxim Gun by a Skirmish Party of Gen Roberts' Division*. 75 ft.
- 237. *Boers Surprising and Capturing a British Picket*. 40 ft.
- 238. *Attack on the Square*. South African Savages' Mode of Warfare. Furious Charge by Boer Cavalry. 75 ft.
- 239. *The British Cavalryman's Last Stand*. A thrilling scene of modern warfare – an entire regiment of men and horses annihilated. 125 ft.

CONCLUSION

These American productions bring us to an end of this account of staged films about the Boer War. One remarkable development in this regard was the large number of such films which were made to represent this war, compared to other wars of the period. During the Spanish-American War less than a

score of staged films were made (the Edison company were responsible for the largest tranche). But during the Boer War there was truly a rash of titles. Coming from Edison and Pathé as well as from the British makers Paul and M&K, the eventual total of staged Boer films was at least twice that of the Spanish-American War. I suspect that one reason for this large output was that several of the firms made entire series on this theme: part of a strategy perhaps to reduce per footage costs. Another reason is that the war continued for a long time (from 1899 to 1902) and, as we have seen from the previous chapter, after about October of 1900 no genuine films were being shot at the front in South Africa (cameramen possibly being barred by the War Office), so there was a gap in the market for films of any kind about the conflict.

A significant point to be made about the acted films of this war is the striking difference between the British and the non-British examples. The former were almost all very imperialistic in tone, while the latter were much more fair and even-handed in their depiction of the two sides in the conflict. Due to their comic-book chauvinism the British films are more intriguing as a viewing experience and historically. From today's perspective these British Boer War films have a double significance. Firstly, in a narrow sense, they are interesting as early experiments in propaganda: a means to demonise an enemy and glorify one's own side. But secondly, and more generally, they may be seen as pioneering exercises in presenting a 'point of view' on film. I will elaborate on this in my concluding chapter, but I will merely raise the idea at this stage that these films were some of the first to put over opinions and beliefs in such a forceful and consistent manner, sometimes employing rich symbolism. Using film to state a point of view was something of a new idea at this time, but an idea which would inform and inspire filmmakers in future.

It seems that the staged films of this war were also an inspiration in another sense, which brings me to a final point. I would suggest that the films which I have discussed in this chapter may be seen as stepping stones in the development of film style and genre. War faking, by utilising a narrative in acted films, may have helped to push producers towards the story form, i.e. narrative, as a dominant film genre. Certainly a move towards making story films was under way soon after the end of the Boer War, and some connection to these staged war films seems quite likely, given that such staged films constitute a major proportion of acted narratives up to about 1901. I will discuss this further in Chapter 13 in connection with James Williamson's work, and also in my Conclusion.

Notes:

¹ One author's statement of the numbers of these Boer War fakes sounds exaggerated, but may not be: '...the makers of the kinematographs, being the most obliging people in the world, turn out desperate encounters by the dozen'. V.W. Cook, 'The Humours of "Living Picture" Making', *Chambers Journal*, 30 June 1900, p.488.

² Alfred Claude Bromhead, 'Reminiscences of the British Film Trade', *Proceedings of the British Kinematograph Society*, no. 21, 11 Dec 1933, p.3-26.

³ Elizabeth Grottle Strebel, 'Imperialist Iconography of Anglo-Boer War Film Footage', in *Film before Griffith*, edited by J. L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.264-271; this is an amended version of her 'Primitive Propaganda: the Boer War Films', *Sight and Sound* 46, no.1, Winter 1976-77, p.45-47.

⁴ He states this in passing, after mentioning the cinematograph's beneficial roles in medical demonstration, etc. *Annuaire générale de la Photographie*, v.9, 1900, p.13.

⁵ Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), vol 2, p.381; TLS 6 Sep 1996, p.16.

⁶ Warwick catalogue, Apr/May 1901.

⁷ Elizabeth Grottle Strebel, 'Imperialist Iconography of Anglo-Boer War Film Footage'.

⁸ *The Showman* 20 Sep 1901, p.21. This transition suggests that an early form of dissolve was used.

⁹ Hepworth released *Return of Lord Roberts*, which showed the commander entering his carriage at Southampton, and then in London receiving the tribute of the populace. See De Lange filmography, film no.90.

¹⁰ 'The office window', *Daily Chronicle* 22 Apr 1907, p.4, col. 6. This columnist added cynically: 'This writer, watching the reproduction of Lord Robert's [sic] landing on his return from South Africa, would have been more impressed if he had not seen it in the faking.' The producer of the Roberts film is not mentioned.

¹¹ Simon Popple, 'British Popular Cultural Representations of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', thesis, Univ. of York, forthcoming.

¹² Warwick catalogue, Sep 1900, p.114; and Warwick catalogue, Apr/May 1901, p.125 under 'Miscellaneous'. The catalogue adds: 'From a humorous point of view one of the biggest successes at a principal London music hall ...'

¹³ Robert W. Paul, et al, 'Before 1910: Kinematograph Experiences', *Proceedings of the British Kinematograph Society*, no. 38, 1936, p.5.

¹⁴ Paul's first films from South Africa were advertised 6 Jan 1900. For more on this theme, see Ian Christie, 'The Boer War in North London'. Paper read at 'Location, location, location' : the 6th British Silent Cinema Weekend, 3-7 April 2003, at Nottingham.

¹⁵ 'Transvaal War Films', PD Dec 1899, p.144-45.

¹⁶ We only know release dates for seven of the films in 1899, and four in 1900, so the remaining undated two titles may well be the other two of 1899 announced by Paul. The price was at the rate of 75 shillings per 100 ft. (so a 60 ft. film would cost 45s.)

¹⁷ 'Cinematograph fakes', *Photographic Chronicle* 14 Aug 1902, p.517-8. The author queried the plausibility of such films (see Chapter 2 on plausibility).

¹⁸ AP 16 Feb 1900, p.122. The writer adds, grudgingly about such 'faked photographs' that, '...we are bound to admit that they are far more successful in their representation of a conventional battle piece than a photograph taken at the seat of war could possibly be'. He also notes that the first Boer fakes were taken outside Paris using 'supers' from a Paris theatre.

¹⁹ This writer states that Paul had been told he looked very like Cronje, the Boer general who surrendered at Paardeberg in 1900, and so Paul produced a film that purported to be taken on the spot, showing the surrender, with himself dressed as Cronje. He showed it at the Alhambra a *fortnight* after the actual event. And as the minimum time for any mail from South Africa to England was then three weeks, there were a lot of trenchant comments in the newspapers and elsewhere about the authenticity of the film! From 'Another Pioneer', *Sunday Dispatch* 17 Feb 1946. So states this writer, but actually (see my previous chapter) Paul's cameraman at the front had actually filmed the real Cronje after his surrender. So this anecdote is probably misinformation.

²⁰ Denis Gifford, 'Fitz: The Old Man of the Screen', in *All Our Yesterdays*, ed. C. Barr (London: BFI, 1986). There is an unsubstantiated claim that 'Briton vs Boer', an 'allegorical tableau', was made by Birt Acres.

²¹ K LW 4 Apr 1912, p.1285.

²² Gifford, 1986, op. cit., p.314. Gifford might have got the golf links detail from talking to Fitzhamon, or simply from Paul's statement above. Gifford's description is: 'Two minutes of white heat excitement taking place on the open veldt' (unknown source).

²³ 'Transvaal War Films', PD Dec 1899, p.144-45. 'Reproductions of Incidents of the Boer War', R.W. Paul catalogue, 1902. Held in BFI and Cinémathèque française, Will Day collection, item no.454; and on Early Rare British Film-Makers' Catalogues microfilms, reel 4.

²⁴ Robert W. Paul, et al, 'Before 1910...' op. cit.

²⁵ In reply my enquiry, I received a letter from Dr Linda Washington, National Army Museum, 6 May 1992. Dr Washington had made an extensive investigation, but could find 'no mention of him in the *Army List* or Hart's *Army List*, which I have checked between the years 1880 and 1901, so he was not a serving officer in the British Army during this period. The two Robert Ashes who appear in the *Indian Army List* are not the same individual. ... He is not mentioned in any of the campaign histories or the biographies of Rhodes which I have been able to check ...' I also wrote to the Transvaal State Archives, but in a letter back to me, 22 May 1992, they reported that no trace could be found of Ashe.

²⁶ Ian Christie notes in his Paul newsletter, 'Finding Paul's Films', that leads supplied by John Barnes and Neil Brown helped trace four surviving Paul films in New Zealand, including *A Camp Smithy*. Three Paul films were found by Philip Adcock of Coventry in his attic (they had been acquired by his father many years earlier), including *Attack on a Picquet* (*MACE Newsletter*, no. 8, Nov 2005).

²⁷ 'Before 1910', op. cit., p.5.

²⁸ R.W. Paul catalogue, *Animated Photograph Films* (1900); and 'Reproductions of Incidents of the Boer War', R.W. Paul catalogue, 1902.

²⁹ *Attack on a Picquet* may be seen on the DVD, *R W Paul: The Collected Films 1895-1908* (BFI, 2007), and on the MACE (Nottingham-based archive) website.

³⁰ The *Photographic Dealer* listing (Dec 1899) offered a variation on this description: 'a most affecting picture, but very beautiful and natural. It depicts the battlefield, with the wounded and dead scattered over it. In the foreground is a nurse, preparing to receive the wounded, while a stretcher-party, attended by a doctor and nurse, are bringing down a wounded Boer, who is tended by a nurse and doctor's orderly. At the same time a British soldier is carried down by his comrades to the other nurses.'

³¹ At the Battle of Majuba Hill in the first Anglo-Boer War of 1881 the British were defeated by the Boers. By the 1890s this was viewed by a number of Britons as a day to be avenged. Incidentally, in the IWM print this title reads slightly differently: 'On Majuba day England was defeated'.

³² The IWM print at this point has a jump cut to a placard with the words 'Kruger the Conqueror', and Kruger stands with one foot on a fallen Lord Roberts.

³³ At this finale the four Tommies line up and there is a tableau. A trade journal printed a lengthy description of this film, noting a vogue for such trick films using 'judicious stops, rejoicing and other devices'. OMLJ June 1900, p.70.

³⁴ Strelbel states that this film does not survive, but it does, in the IWM.

³⁵ The most complete list of the fakes is in the form of an M&K ad in *The Showman* 6 Sep 1901, p.xi, though this does not include all of the titles.

³⁶ The first titles included *The Dispatch [or Despatch] Bearer and Washing the Boer Prisoner*. See PD May 1900, p.115. See also *The Showman* 6 Sep 1901, p.584 which states that M&K are securing a new series of war films. M&K films were sometimes distributed by John Wrench and Son.

³⁷ Vanessa Toulmin, Patrick Russell and Simon Pople, eds., *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film* (London: BFI, 2004), p.8. Most of the surviving films except *The Clever Correspondent* were shown in the NFT, Oct 1999.

³⁸ Entry by Gifford on M&K in McKernan/Herbert, *Who's Who*.

³⁹ See Simon Pople, "'Startling, realistic, pathetic": The Mitchell and Kenyon Boer War Films' in *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon*, op. cit., p.151-52.

⁴⁰ As Pople notes, the elusive de Wet was a common subject for satire at this time. An example of this topic appears in *Ally Sloper's Half Holiday*, 25 August 1900, p.403, in the context of moving pictures: a showman claims that if you look into his mutoscope you'll see a soldier 'surrounding de Wet', the joke being that the film on the reel is a soldier drinking beer (i.e. 'the wet').

⁴¹ This was stated by the late Mr. W. Dyer, of Farnworth, a travelling fairground actor. See '40 years of films in Bolton', *Bolton Journal and Guardian* 20 Nov 1930 (courtesy NWFa). Brownhill (not Brownhills) is just to the northwest of Blackburn, while Kearsley and Clifton are much further south, being adjacent rail stations on the line from Bolton to Manchester.

⁴² John M. East, 'The Birth of the Cinema Trade in Scotland', *Scotland's Magazine*, 69, Dec 1973, p.28.

⁴³ While the following material might fit more properly in my 'exhibition' section, the cases are so specific to M&K, that I discuss them at this point.

⁴⁴ Biographical article about Frederick Edward Weisker, TC 8 Jan 1914, p.85. He recalled the full title as *Poisoning the Well – an Incident in the Boer War*. He states in this article that he bought most of the company's films in London from Paul and from Pathé.

⁴⁵ As shown in a frame still in Maryann Gomes, *The Picture House...* (Manchester: North West Film Archive, Manchester Polytechnic, 1988).

⁴⁶ 'Norwich', *The Showman* 12 April 1901, p.245.

⁴⁷ Letter from John S. Fisher in the *Times* 22 March 1929, p.12c. The letter discusses the importance of travelling fairground showmen in the early days. Fisher adds that another film, *The Jameson Raid*, 'was also shown regularly in these portable shows'.

⁴⁸ Films including *The Dispatch Rider* were shown by Brook and Borlands' Viagraph at the Regent Theatre, Salford, 19 Nov 1900. (Information from NWFa). A poster for the 'Bio-Tyrolgraph', 1901, listed films to be selected from nightly ('the latest Boer War films, direct from the front'), including *The Dispatch Rider*, *Chasing the Boers*, and *Shooting a Spy*. The poster for Frederick's Royal Tyroleans was displayed at the 'Moving Performance' conference, Bristol in 1996.

⁴⁹ He notes that it showed, 'a handful of Colonial irregulars ambushed by the Boers, the surprise being followed by one hero in the little band cutting his way through in order to save the dispatches he carried'. 'Cinematograph fakes', *Photographic Chronicle*, op. cit.: this article is about the implausibility of some fakes.

⁵⁰ Alfred Claude Bromhead, 'Reminiscences of the British Film Trade', op. cit. Bromhead misremembered its length too, as 120 feet (in fact it was little more than half that). As further evidence of the wide distribution of *The Dispatch Bearer*, and the attention still being paid to it years later, there is a frame still of this film in the Will Day collection, which is reproduced, for example, in *The Pageant of the Century* (London: Odham's Press, 1933), p.71.

⁵¹ 'Glasgow notes: The late Mr. George Green', *The Cinema* (Scottish section) 25 Nov 1915, p.84. This states: 'Mr Green produced the first film on Scottish soil: this was called "The Dispatch Rider," and was produced during the Boer War, the negative being afterwards sold to the Warwick Co.' (Thanks to Tony Fletcher for this reference).

⁵² 'A Cinematographic Incident', *BJP Suppl.*, 1 Nov 1901, p.83.

⁵³ They employed multiple shots in at least one other film of this year. See details of M&K's edited Goudie film (1901) in Vanessa Toulmin, *Electric Edwardians: The Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection* (London: BFI, 2006).

⁵⁴ *The Era* 9 August 1902, p.32. Reference from Vanessa Toulmin. Gifford on the other hand writes that it was in June 1902, with the ending of the war, that M&K's library of fifteen faked films was assembled into a special show entitled, 'Hands Off the Flag'. See entry by Gifford on M&K in McKernan/Herbert, *Who's Who*.

⁵⁵ Strebel's description of the film comes from *Hepwix Films for the Cinematograph* (London, Hepworth & Co., 1903).

⁵⁶ From Strebel, op. cit. In the Hepworth catalogue this is described as an 'animated cartoon', though this term is being used in a metaphoric sense, and this date would have been very (too) early for what would have been sophisticated single-frame animation. The catalogue description in any case suggests live action. This film is cited in *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1937, p.126.

⁵⁷ These descriptions are from: *A Selected Catalogue of the Best and Most Interesting 'Hepwix' Films* (London, 1903). p.20-21, which is on Early Rare British Film-Makers' Catalogues microfilms, reel 2.

⁵⁸ I will just mention the firm of Bamforth, as the company's catalogue of this period lists a plethora of slide sets about the conflict. These range from straight propaganda in 'Krugers Great Blunder' and 'Marching Through Pretoria' (the latter was 10 slides), to the comic set, 'The Three Boers' (six slides). See James Bamforth, *A Detailed Catalogue of Photographic Lantern Slides - Life Models...* (nd), which lists Boer war slide sets on pp.227-8, 241, 246, 276

and 286. James Bamforth was, of course, an important early filmmaker as well as lantern slide manufacturer, though Bamforth doesn't seem to have made any actual war films.

⁵⁹ 'Twenty-nine years as an exhibitor: the trade's debt of gratitude to the pioneer', KW 17 June 1926, p.57. Blake was the President of the trade body, the C.E.A., and had been in the business almost since it began. Blake didn't know if his friend Hepworth was responsible for writing the poem. The Paul film was forty feet long, he noted.

⁶⁰ *The Showman* 27 Sep 1901, p.32: ad for Gaumont Elgé film no.923, *Boer Atrocities*. The length was given as 100 ft. and price 1/- per foot, 'less usual discount'. The same information appears in Gaumont's ad in *The Era* 21 Sep 1901, p.27.

⁶¹ *The Showman* 20 Sep 1901, p.32. The following week the journal claimed that this film was somehow factual: 'During the continuance of the South African war, so much has been heard of the Boer atrocities that a picture bringing the facts home will be of interest'. *The Showman* 27 Sep 1901, p.36.

⁶² *The Showman* 27 Sep 1901, p.32.

⁶³ 'Boer atrocities', OMLJ Nov 1901, p.96. I assume he was a customer as he had received the circular from Gaumont. His letter begins: 'To the Editor. Dear Sir, I lately received by post a circular from one of our leading makers of cinematographic films, containing details of what they call one of their latest films. It is headed "Boer Atrocities," and it reads as follows...'

⁶⁴ Elgé catalogue, Jan-June 1903 (issued Oct 1903), p.3: film no. 2B, *Signing Peace at Pretoria*, priced at £4.2s.6.

⁶⁵ 'Disgraceful fake pictures', *Moving Picture News* 16 Dec 1911, p.6. This was in the context of fake films of the Italian-Turkish war being exhibited at that time, and was presumably written by Alfred Saunders who had been a lanternist in Britain during the Boer War, and soon afterwards emigrated to the USA, where he founded *Moving Picture News* and was editor until 1913.

⁶⁶ The Clee Hills are in Shropshire (the highest hills in the English Midlands), Foxhills is in Surrey to the southwest of London, and Hampstead Heath is in north London. The latter might have been used by London production companies, but I believe (see above) that R.W. Paul filmed in Muswell Hill, and Bromhead would probably have shot his fake war film where he was based in south London.

⁶⁷ Article by F. Mottershaw in KLV 10 Apr 1917, p.102. Mottershaw confirms that this film 'was produced during the Boer War'. He notes that SPC's films were sold to several different companies, including Gaumont, Paul, Wrench, etc, as well as foreign companies.

⁶⁸ Robert Benfield, *Bijou Kinema : A History of Early Cinema in Yorkshire* (Sheffield: Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1976), p.52.

⁶⁹ This claim about *Matches Appeal* should not be dismissed out of hand, and was first made by Melbourne-Cooper in a BBC interview with Ernest Lindgren, Frank Kessler tells me. Tony Fletcher has seen the Hadley Woods claim in the Melbourne-Cooper materials in St Albans Museum, and also a contention that Cooper developed some of Warwick's (including Rosenthal's) Boer war films.

⁷⁰ In the case of *Reservist* the soldier finds his family destitute: the message here being similar to that post World War 1, of 'a home fit for heroes'. These films are held in George Eastman House (*Soldier's Return*) and the NFTVA (*Reservist*). See Martin Sopocy, 'A Narrated Cinema: The Pioneer Story Films of James A. Williamson', *Cinema Journal* 8, no. 1, Fall 1978, p.13-15, 23.

⁷¹ The film was formerly known as *Set-To Between John Bull and Paul Kruger* (a 90 foot long print held in the NFTVA) but original copyright frames have since been located in the files of Britain's National Archives. These show that the film was copyrighted on 15 March 1900 under the title I mention by John Sloane Barnes for the Anglo American Exchange, 3 Northumberland Ave., London WC (and 60 Gower St.). Barnes seems to have made no other films.

⁷² The eleven films were numbered 521-530 and 538 (538 was possibly shot a little later). For their UK release, the films were priced according to length: 65 ft being £1.12s.6d and 50 ft being £1.5s.0d.

⁷³ The two films were described in 'Up-to-date films', PD Dec 1899, p.144. A periodical like this dated December would have been printed the previous month, which means that these films would have been ready by November. The two films were: *The Shooting of the Boer Spy by the English*, and an untitled film described as, 'a view of the English Battery attacked by

the Boers, resulting in a glorious victory for the former' (presumably this is Pathé's Glencoe title).

⁷⁴ BJP Suppl., 5 Jan 1900, p.8.

⁷⁵ The five films are listed in *Les Inventions et les Industries Nouvelles* no.1, 1 Jan 1900, according to Henri Bousquet, who states that these titles match the first eight films released by Pathé, with some title and number variations. Thus, episode 7 is number 4 in this periodical, entitled *Au Combat de la Tugela*; and episode 4, *Une Escarmouche près de Glencoe* is number 3 in the periodical. (It's not clear from Bousquet which five of the eight films are listed in this periodical). Henri Bousquet, *Catalogue Pathé des Années 1896 à 1914: Vol 1, 1896-1906* (Bures sur Yvette: Henri Bousquet, 1996).

⁷⁶ These three films were numbered 529, 530, and 538 in the catalogue, and these numbers were the same in the British catalogue. The earlier films have different numbers in the British and French Pathé catalogues.

⁷⁷ One French cineaste suggested that Zecca had been involved in making a fake of *La Guerre de Boers*. See Henri Diamant-Berger, *Il Était une Fois le Cinéma* (Paris: Jean-Claude Simoën, 1977), p.43. I have an unsourced note that Lucien Nonguet made *La Guerre de Transvaal* – which was shown by the Royal Bioscope in Bordeaux in 1900.

⁷⁸ AP 16 Feb 1900, p.122.

⁷⁹ 'Cinematograph fakes', *Photographic Chronicle*, op. cit. It is not clear which company he is referring to, though he seems to imply it was Méliès.

⁸⁰ 'War photographs to order', *South Africa*, 18 Nov 1899, p.449. The article is quoted in BJP 24 Nov 1899, p.738.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* The paragraph concluded: 'In consequence, Londoners must not be surprised if they shortly obtain, *via* Paris, what purport to be Kodak reproductions of the wounding of General Symons, and other prominent incidents of the war. There seem to have been no mules at the Buttes-Chaumont, or, doubtless, the famous stampede would figure in the series of pictures.' The latter is a reference to an incident in South Africa on 30 October when a British military convoy of mules was stampeded by stones rolled from the road above.

⁸² Likely periodicals are: *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Journal illustré*, *Petit Journal supplément illustré*, *La Vie Illustré*.

⁸³ I realise that this evidence is not strong, and all we can say for sure is that during or before November 1899, fake photographs or films were reported as being made in Buttes Chaumont park, Paris. And there are other reports of faked *still* photographs being made in Paris. See BJP 16 Mar 1900, p.173. See also: 'Bogus war and other pictures', BJP Suppl. 1 Dec 1899, p.92. A parody about the press commissioning faked stills of the Boer War is 'War pictures', *Review of the Week* 19 May 1900, p.775.

⁸⁴ This is a story by Maurice Normand, 'Devant le Cinématographe', in *l'Illustration*, no. 2974, 24 Feb 1900, p.122-123. It is about an Irish girl working in Paris, who sees a film apparently showing her lover, a British soldier, being killed in a battle in South Africa. She bursts into tears, but a man in the audience tells her: 'Don't you realise the soldiers you saw were mere actors? These scenes were not cinematographed in Africa. It was a bad pantomime played in Paris itself, at the Buttes-Chaumont. I can show you the place. Do you really think that photographers would take pictures under hails of bullets and cannon balls?' An English translation of this story appears in *Soldiers of the Queen*, no.80, March 1995; a German version appeared in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 8 July 1900, p.1-3; and see *KINtop*, no. 6, 1997. As Frank Kessler points out in *KINtop*, no. 15, 2006, Normand was suggesting 'that there were two kinds of spectators, 'naïve' ones, who take everything they see as an authentic record, and 'enlightened' ones, who are capable of distinguishing between staged scenes and documentary views.'

⁸⁵ In an article about Méliès in *Le Petit Bleu de Paris*, no.35, 23 June 1902.

⁸⁶ Letter from Albert Levy of Asnières (Seine) in BJP 18 July 1902, p.579. He states that these were 'photographs', but his letter is mainly about cinematography, so I assume this is what he meant.

⁸⁷ He added that, when these films were screened, the public believed they were taken on the real battlefield. Victorin Jasset, 'La Mise en Scène Cinématographique', *Ciné Journal*, 21 Oct-25 Nov 1911, reprinted in Marcel Lapière, ed. *Anthologie du Cinéma* (Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1946), p.84. In this section of his essays, Jasset was describing the making of fakes in order to save the cost of going to the real location.

⁸⁸ Richard Abel sent me an email conveying his doubts that Pathé would have filmed in Buttes-Chaumont due to this reason of the distance from Vincennes. I suspect that only a close scrutiny of Paris newspapers or archives of the era would establish the truth about filming in the park.

⁸⁹ See Roland Cosandey, *Cinéma 1900, Trente Films Dans une Boîte à Chaussures* (Lausanne: Editions Payot, 1996): images on pp.85, 87, 89.

⁹⁰ Conveniently there is a rail line between the two places (Bel-Air to Belleville stations), though I am not certain that it was there in 1899.

⁹¹ Ward Muir, 'The khaki-covered camera', *Photogram* Aug 1900, p.237. The poem is about the activities of the so-called 'Kinetograph' company. Incidentally, Muir was later (in the teens and 20s) a published writer on travel and general themes, and an amateur photographer.

⁹² In the mid 1990s thirty original 35mm positive prints were found in Switzerland, discovered in a shoebox in a photographic museum in Vevey (originally only fifteen titles were thought to be there). These included three Boer War fakes, apparently made by Pathé. Two of these seem to correspond to films 4 and 5 in my listing, *A Skirmish at Glencoe* and *Episode During the Battle of Spion Kop*. As I discuss in my main text, the third film is not in the Pathé catalogue. They are described in Cosandey, op. cit., p.84-89 as film numbers FB5, FB6, and FB7.

⁹³ The event was 'resonant', says Cosandey, *ibid*.

⁹⁴ Frank Kessler has found that other Pathé films do not feature in the Pathé catalogue, such as films of the Kaiser in the early teen years. Kessler surmises that Pathé may have had a policy of only listing their films in the general catalogue if they were deemed to have a general, international appeal.

⁹⁵ This subject was also portrayed in R.W. Paul's film, *Shooting the Spy*.

⁹⁶ This subject was also portrayed in R.W. Paul's film, *Battle of Glencoe*.

⁹⁷ C.G. Paul, 'Kodak photography in peace and war', *Captain* 3, July 1900, p.291-97. The anecdote doesn't actually mention the production company, but I assume that the mention of a 'Parisian photographer' is a coded reference to Pathé.

⁹⁸ AP 11 May 1900, p.361. This article actually uses the term 'pictures', but must surely mean films if these were being cheered by audiences. The previous source (C.G. Paul) mentions a similar example but to do with a lantern lecture, where a slide was shown depicting Australian troops, but who were described as Boers.

⁹⁹ 'Animated photographs', *MHTR*, 27 Oct 1899, p.247.

¹⁰⁰ Joë Hamman, *Du Far-West à Montmartre, un Demi-Siècle d'Aventures* (Paris: Editeurs français réunis, 1962).

¹⁰¹ My principal sources are the following works by Geoffrey Donaldson: 'De eerste Nederlandse speelfilms en de gebroeders Mullens', *Skrien*, no. 28; *Of Joy and Sorrow : A Filmography of Dutch Silent Fiction* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederlands Filmmuseum, 1997), p.53. The late Geoffrey Donaldson was famously generous in providing information to other scholars, and in a long letter to the author, 1 Feb 1993, included almost everything which was to be in his 1997 book and more (and answered other queries).

¹⁰² From the magazine *De Kijker* 15 Nov 1899, headed 'The War on the Roof'. Donaldson sent me this translation: 'For a few days, when the weather is good in the mornings, one can see on the roof of Variété Flora in the Amstelstraat, that Transvaal pictures are being made for the Bioscope. ... Mr Nöggerath certainly thinks that the world wants to be deceived.' Donaldson's catalogue of 1997 gives the original title of the film(s) as *De Oorlog in Transvaal* or *Transvaalbeelden*, or in English, *The War in Transvaal* or *Transvaal Pictures*, though the films were not actually released on the market and may never have had formal titles.

¹⁰³ As Donaldson informed me, the book was called *50 Jaar Bioscoopfauteuil*, and the Boer reference, which Jordaan states is one of his first film-related memories, comes in the first chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Donaldson suggests the actor might have been Barend Barendse, because in the weeks between the Flora première of this film and screenings in the Paleis voor Volksvlijt, a play by Alex Benno was presented at the latter venue, as I mention in the main text, in which the title rôle of Kruger was played by Barendse. Thus, notes Donaldson, 'It is possible, even probable, that it was Barend Barendse who appeared as Paul Kruger in Nöggerath's film. However, it should be pointed out that when Benno's play was presented, two other plays about the Boer War were running in Amsterdam, one with Marius Spree as Kruger, the other with Jan Buderman in the same role.'

¹⁰⁵ A review from *De Telegraaf* 11 November 1899 of a programme then being presented in the Flora.

¹⁰⁶ At about this time advertisements started appearing in the Amsterdam and Rotterdam newspapers announcing the screening of 'Transvaalbeelden' (Transvaal Pictures), but it is not clear whether these are the Nöggerath films or films imported from abroad. But an advertisement in *Algemeen Handelsblad* of 23 December 1899 is for these Nöggerath films: it announced that *De Oorlog in Transvaal* (The War in the Transvaal) was to be shown on 24, 25 and 26 December in the Paleis voor Volksvlucht, screenings arranged by Nöggerath. Donaldson states in his 1997 catalogue that there were 'some outdoor scenes' in this late December version.

¹⁰⁷ After the Boer War Nöggerath continued in the film exhibition business with his family. In 1907 they opened the first major cinema in Amsterdam, the Bioscope-Theater. At about this time another son, Theodor (1882-1961) became a film cameraman, and was active through the teens.

¹⁰⁸ 'The scene was on the rocky side of the eastern slope of the second Orange Mountain, near the Livingstone line.' From 'Injured in sham battle', *Philadelphia Ledger*, 12 April, 1900: quoted in Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon*, chapter 5, and p.146-8 and 214. Elsewhere it is stated that the filming was done on the farm of Tom Vincent, who also supplied the horses.

¹⁰⁹ The participants were mainly members of a local militia and received \$2 each for the day (after striking for a 75¢ raise!) See 'Fake Pictures', *Phonoscope*, July 1900, p.9. Cited in Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon*. The strike was reported in the *Phonoscope* Apr 1900, and briefly in 'American notes', PN 13 Mar 1903, p.163.

¹¹⁰ 'Injured in sham battle', op. cit. The newspaper added that maybe this accident would lend more realism to the film! The scenes were intended to represent either the Battle of Spion Kop or the Battle of Colenso. At least three of the films involve the cannon: *Capture of Boer Battery*, *English Lancers Charging*, and *Battle of Mafeking*. The accident was later reported in BJP 20 Apr 1900, p.253, though this stated, mistakenly, that it was the two leading actors who were seriously injured by the cannon. The news was also reported in *Phot. Wochenblatt* 15 May 1900, p.160.

¹¹¹ Ad for these three films in NY Clipper 28 Apr 1900, p.216 and 5 May 1900, p.240.

¹¹² NY Clipper 12 May 1900, p.260.

¹¹³ Gartenberg usefully gives copyright dates of these films. The first 3 titles were copyrighted 14 April and the last 4 titles on 28 April. A couple of the earlier titles were made with alternate versions, separately copyrighted. Jon Gartenberg, 'Camera Movement in Edison and Biograph Films, 1900-1906', in *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study*, ed. R. Holman (Brussels: FIAF, 1982), p.169-180.

¹¹⁴ Ramsaye states that the costumes for the Edison Boer fakes came from 'the Eaves establishment'. Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1964 [1926]), p.403-404.

¹¹⁵ David Levy, 'Re-Constituted Newsreels, Re-Enactments and the American Narrative Film', in *Cinema 1900-1906: An Analytical Study*, op. cit., p.250.

¹¹⁶ This ad appears just below a Lubin ad for Boer War films. More detail about these films is in Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures..Filmography*, #800-808. The films were sold at the rate of 15 cents per foot. Thus a 50 ft. film cost \$7.50, 75 ft. was \$ 11.25, and 100 ft. was \$15.00 (the 25 ft. film was a little over this rate, at \$4).

¹¹⁷ Edmund George Cousins, *Filmiland in Ferment* (London: Denis Archer, 1932), p.32-33. He thought that the film had been shot 'in a typically English corner of parkland', though I would think this could equally have been New Jersey. This reference was sent me by Tony Fletcher.

¹¹⁸ Lubin ad for 'Boer War Film', *NY Clipper*, 21 Apr 1900, p.192 (cited by AFI).

¹¹⁹ Lubin ad in NY Clipper 12 May 1900, p.260 (this appears just above the Edison ad for Boer films which I mentioned earlier). The ad states, 'Having made special arrangements with the foreign film manufacturers, we are now prepared to furnish French, English and German subjects at the same price as our films. Send for list.' That Lubin was importing foreign films reinforces my suggestion that the 450 ft. film was a buy-in from abroad, perhaps from Britain.

¹²⁰ MHTR 15 June 1900, p.378. Pitrot was also given a tour of the 'factory' (studio) and saw the machinery there, and had some of Lubin's fake Passion Play pictures films projected for him. He was very impressed by the clarity and sharpness of these films. If, as he states, orders were coming in from all over the country, perhaps descriptions in local newspapers might emerge, or even film prints.

¹²¹ NY Clipper 30 Jun 1900, p.408 (cited by AFI).

¹²² 'Lost in Lubin fire', MPW 11 July 1914, p.267. This report mentions several war films lost including of the 'Transvaal War'.

¹²³ American Vitagraph Co., *List of New Films* (1900), p.4. On Musser, *Motion Picture Catalogs... Microfilm Edition*, reel 4. The catalogue states of these five films that such non-genuine subjects will always be, 'announced as such' by Vitagraph; i.e. the company would not be deceptive in labelling a fake as an actuality. In the early era, film distributors handled films from many different makers, often failing to identify who actually made them, or making misleading claims about this (sometimes even claiming them as their own). And Smith later made false claims of having filmed at the Boer war.

¹²⁴ Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights*, op. cit., p.404.

¹²⁵ The Vitagraph double subject, #235 *Repulse of the Boers*, could be two Edison titles, *English Lancers...* and *Red Cross Ambulance...*, which are the same lengths; #236 *Capture...*, could be R.W. Paul's *Capture of a Maxim*; #237 *Boers Surprising and Capturing a British Picket*, could be Paul's *Attack on a Picquet*, which is the same length of 40'; #238, *Attack...* might be Edison's *Battle of Mafeking*, which is the same length.