



In the 1910's, 'Cinema' developed and eventually overtook music hall as the pre-eminent mass entertainment around the time of the First World War.

The film industry was no longer a playground for amateurs. 1911 can be seen as 'the second birth of cinema'. This was the year when cinema started to cut its ties to other media businesses, such as the fairground circuits and the music halls. Cinema circuits began to form, and 1911 was notable for the establishment of the *Electric Cinemas*, many of which survive to this day.

The rise of the longer 'feature' film, which would become the predominant product of the film industry, necessitated the wholesale move to purpose-built cinemas. These longer films no longer fitted into the music hall structure and were sufficiently popular to stand on their own. Audiences wanted to watch longer and more fully formed stories.

The new business model was founded on two additions to the mixed cinema program - the regular newsreels, which gave solid social purpose to cinemagoing, and the regular adventure series and serials which now became a regular fixture on British screens.

The cinema itself could attract a much broader audience than music hall and fairground attractions. Between 1910 and World War I British cinema was dominated by film adaptations of established literary works such as Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist', 'David Copperfield' and 'Scrooge', William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', and Sir Walter Scott's 'Ivanhoe'. These were attempts to bring in a more educated audience.

During the First World War, a key film of the period was *The Battle of the Somme* which was released in 1916. The film was deeply controversial because the battle scenes were so shocking. Many observers felt it was too graphic. On the other hand, it appears that people appreciated the reality of the film-making. They preferred a film like 'The Battle of the Somme' because it didn't try to pretend that war was easy or fun.

Pre 1914 cinema also saw the rise Science Fiction, inspired by the writings of Jules Verne and other science fiction writers. 'The Airship Destroyer' and 'The Aerial Submarine' in 1910 featured the hybrid vehicle of the title as a pirate hunter, showing the menace of aerial warfare. Two films of 1911 'The Pirates of 1920' and 'The Aerial Anarchists' showed the threat posed to cities by aerial bombardment, reflecting the then very real fear of German Zeppelin attacks.

The first British science fiction feature film, the silent 'A Message from Mars', was released in 1913. It was adapted from the 1899 play by Richard Ganthony by director J. Wallett Waller. With a running time of 68 minutes this presented a significant move from the short one- or two-reel films of the previous decade.

The film mirrors the popularity of adaptations. The plot has echoes of the popular Charles Dickens' redemption novella 'A Christmas Carol' with a Martian taking the place of the ghost of Jacob Marley. Wealthy amateur astronomer Horace Parker (played by famous theatre actor Charles Hawtrey reprising the part he first played on stage in 1899) is engaged to Minnie Templer. He is visited on Christmas Eve by aliens who show him his selfish nature which is causing his fiancé to have doubts.

The film was influenced by French illusionist and filmmaker Georges Méliès' ground breaking 1902 movie 'A Trip to the Moon', famous for its ingeniously designed sets. However, the special effects in 'A Message to Mars' are quite limited, mostly stopping the camera to make the messenger appear or disappear. There is a quite successful trick showing the magic power of the messenger with the whole image shaking when Horace tries to hit him. This was achieved from a combination of both shaking the camera and several objects on the set.

The interior scenes are filmed in a rather static way, with wide shot and fixed camera. Nevertheless, there is more mobility of the camera for the exterior location shots in London with some panning and tracking shots, notably when a fire engine comes to put out a fire.

It's fascinating to watch a British feature from this period and Waller shows himself to be aware of the latest innovations in his choice of shots. The narrative flows seamlessly when characters' eye-line's lead onto each scene shift. The camera pans and the actors use the framed space to maximum effect.

'A Message to Mars' features the first on-screen imaginings of Martians by a British film-maker, as futuristically clad members of the Martian court. Thought transference, instant space travel, mind control and the use of a far-seeing crystal ball all feature in this ground-breaking film."

The turbulent decade from both an historical and film industry perspective came to an end with little realization of both the aesthetic and technical revolutions which were to come in the 1920's.