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George Berthold Samuelson (1889–1947): Britain’s Jewish film pioneer*

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Jews played a decisive role in the American film industry’s growth and development,¹ yet their pioneering contribution to the industry in Britain tends to be overlooked. When motion pictures were still in their infancy (1900–1910), they were generally considered to be “a low-grade form of entertainment – suitable only for the immigrant or the uneducated masses – rather than a valid art form, and those connected with films were held in contempt”.²

Not having to contend with powerful vested interests, enterprising Jews in Britain and the United States opened little picture houses for the less affluent, enabling them to enjoy the latest silent films. “Jews moved into motion picture production and exhibition for the same reasons they had gravitated to fields like small merchandising and the garment trades: little skill and little capital were required to participate. And since it was a new industry, all entrepreneurs were on an equal footing”.³ Before long, those operating these cheap movie theatres (known as cinemas in Britain and as bioscopes in South Africa) turned to film distribution. Some became producers and directors; others, particularly in Hollywood, went on to head large film companies with their own studios, hundreds of employees and a multi-million dollar turnover.

“For a long period”, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “American competition made it impossible for the British motion picture to gain a foothold in the world market” and it was a Hungarian Jew, Sir Alexander Korda (1893–1956), who “finally pulled the British industry out of the doldrums” after he established the London Films Company in 1930.⁴ While doing justice to Korda, this assertion underrates the previous achievements of Sir Michael Balcon (1896–1977; in partnership with Victor Saville, Balcon had spent £30,000 filming his first picture, *Woman to Woman*, in 1923).⁵ It

* This is a slightly revised version of a lecture delivered to the Israel branch of the Society on 28 Feb. 2011.

¹ See Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: 1984) and Neal Gabler, *Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, 1988).

² *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972; hereafter *EJ*), s.v. “Motion Pictures”, 12: 446.

³ Erens, *Jew in American Cinema*, 53.

⁴ *EJ* 12: 451–52.

⁵ One of many facts omitted from the skimpy article in the *EJ* (4: 129–30).

completely ignores the still earlier pioneering role of George Berthold Samuelson (1889–1947), who had made no less than seventy films by 1921. These included major productions of the silent era, films that had successful runs in the United States and others of a later vintage (1927–33) that showed both Jews and Judaism in a positive light.

When I began researching G. B. Samuelson's film work, in 1994, there were scarcely any references to him in books dealing with motion picture history (a brief entry in *Hallimell's Filmgoer's Companion* states that Samuelson was "a British producer and distributor of silent films" but gives incorrect dates for his birth and death.⁶ One exception was the US writer David Shipman, who dismissed the earlier British entrepreneurs as "mainly dilettantes and theatre showmen" but hastened to add that "there were sound businessmen behind the successful companies, which were Stoll, Ideal, G. B. Samuelson, Gaumont, the team of Thomas Welsh and George Pearson – the latter an alumnus of both Samuelson and Gaumont – and Hepworth".⁷ Shipman observed that Herbert Wilcox possessed a "ruthlessness and drive [that] would not have disgraced an American producer" and that, after the British industry's post-First World War decline, Michael Balcon "also fought back by raising quality and looking realistically to the American market".⁸ Samuelson tried to do the same but possessed neither the former's "ruthlessness" nor the latter's considerable financial resources.

In the course of my preliminary research I managed to obtain photocopies of various items relating to the Samuelson family which Linda Greenlick, the chief librarian of the *Jewish Chronicle*, was kind enough to dispatch from London. I also had the opportunity of meeting David Samuelson, the film-maker's eldest son, who showed me the draft of a book he was writing about his father and who allowed me to tape our conversation at his London home. That book appeared as a massive (1110-page) illustrated volume,⁹ for private distribution only, and the copy I was fortunate enough to receive in November 2010 has enabled me to sift through the vast amount of authoritative information which it contains.

This paper is a much enlarged and updated version of an article published more than fifteen years ago in South Africa.¹⁰ Since then, much more has been written about the Jewish film pioneer, both in print and on the internet. Rachael Low refers to him in her seven-volume work on British film history

⁶ *Hallimell's Filmgoer's Companion*, 9th edition (London, 1988), 611.

⁷ David Shipman, *The Story of Cinema* (New York, 1982), 187.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 188–89.

⁹ Harold Dunham and David W. Samuelson, *Bertie: The Life and Times of G. B. Samuelson* (3rd impression, 2010; hereafter *Bertie*).

¹⁰ "G. B. Samuelson", in *Jewish Affairs*, 50, 2 (Johannesburg, Winter 1995): 21–27. To make amends for the *EJ*'s disregard of 'Bertie' Samuelson, I prepared an entry for the *EJ Decennial Book 1983–92*; unfortunately, it could not be processed in time.

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and a biographical entry has at last appeared in the *DNB*.¹¹ Thanks to these publications, G. B. Samuelson is no longer an unjustly forgotten man.

Family background

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a Jewish furrier named Jacob Metzenberg lived in the Prussian town of Lissa (now Leszno in Poland), where leading rabbis and graduates of the local *yeshivah* (such as R. Akiva Eger) made the community renowned.¹² Samuel Metzenberg (c. 1798–1875), one of Jacob’s five children, had four sons and four daughters. Two of the sons, Elias (1826–1901) and Henschel (1829–1889), left home in 1841 and found their way to Dublin, where an uncle of theirs, Levy Metzenberg, had settled the year before. Levy, a hot-tempered, quarrelsome individual, was expelled from the Dublin Hebrew Congregation in September 1845 (apparently, he was constantly at loggerheads with the synagogue’s honorary officers because of his unpaid debts and misbehaviour¹³), which is probably the reason why his nephews changed their surname from Metzenberg to the patronymic Samuelson in 1846.¹⁴

Elias began trading as an outfitter, married Sarah Solomon in July 1845 and had thirteen children, three of whom died in infancy. His merchant and military tailoring establishment flourished, enjoying the patronage of the Duke of Connaught and other members of the nobility. Elias served twice as the president of the Dublin Hebrew Congregation (in 1859 and 1865). After moving to London early in 1874, he transferred his business to the Savile Row district and had many celebrated clients but only Chavah (Clarissa; 1846–1911), Elias and Sarah’s eldest child, had Jewish descendants.¹⁵

Henschel is thought to have been a jeweller in Dublin but evidently found this trade unrewarding since he boarded a ship for Liverpool in or around 1873 and then moved to Southport, a pleasant seaside town to the north of Liverpool. There he opened a cigar and tobacco store at 41 Nevill Street, close to the promenade. His business prospered and, as a man of 46, he married Bertha Weile (1855–1913) at the Maida Vale home of his brother Elias, the ceremony (on 21 December 1875) being conducted by the Chief Rabbi, Nathan Marcus Adler. Bertha’s father, Solomon Weile, had died

¹¹ See the new edition of Rachael Low’s *History of British Film* (1997) and Luke McKernan, “Samuelson, George Berthold [Bertie] (1889–1947), film producer and director”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB; online edition, 2004).

¹² For more details see *EJ* 11: 52–53.

¹³ Louis Hyman, *The Jews of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Year 1910* (London and Jerusalem, 1972), 140ff.

¹⁴ *Bertie*, 2–3. Some of the family information provided below is quoted from this book.

¹⁵ A fact ascertained from the Samuelson family tree.

young and her mother, Rahle, had contracted a second marriage in Germany with a widower, the Reverend Isaac Bischofswerder, prior to their arrival in England. Isaac already had seven children of his own and served as the minister of the small Jewish community in Penzance, Cornwall, where his large family helped to keep a *minyán* going for about four decades. (This community's most famous member, in the early nineteenth century, was the distiller Lemon Hart, 1768–1845, who later became a warden of London's Great Synagogue.)¹⁶

Bertha was probably glad to leave home and move to Southport, even though Henschel was physically handicapped and more than twice her age. Their happiness was marred by the death of a firstborn son in 1877 but they went on to have four other children: Julian Ulric (1878–1934), who became England's "King of Pantomime"; Maurice Laurence (Lauri; 1880–1951), who also made his career on the stage; Rahleen May (1886–1950), a businesswoman; and George Berthold (Bertie; 1889–1947), with whom this paper is chiefly concerned. (Having anglicized Bertha's maiden name, Julian later appeared on the stage as Julian Wylie and Maurice followed his example. Many of Bertha's descendants have also added Wylie to their surname.)

There was no organized Jewish community in Southport until around 1890. (When its first synagogue was consecrated in May 1893, there were about thirty Jewish families living in the town but regular Hebrew classes were not held there until 1896.) This must have obliged Henschel and Bertha, an observant couple, to join one of the Liverpool synagogues (probably the New Hebrew Congregation) and attend services there on the High Holy Days. (The fact that Henschel and Bertha were interred in the New Hebrew Congregation's Green Lane cemetery points to their having become members of Liverpool's Hope Place [NHC] Synagogue.) Bertie Samuelson was just seven weeks' old when his father died of bronchitis and heart disease at the age of sixty, leaving his mother a widow in her early thirties with four children to bring up and a business to run. She managed to discharge these responsibilities and, by 1903, Julian and Morris were living away from home, Rahleen was attending a private Jewish school in London and Bertie had left school to find employment in Southport.

Embarking on a film career

Over the next few years (1903–08), Bertie Samuelson tried to earn his livelihood, first as a shop assistant, then by running a penny bazaar and managing a concert party. His interest was finally aroused by the "animated pictures"

¹⁶ *EJ* 13: 269. For a historical survey of the Penzance *kehillah* see Chris Richards, "The Lost Jews of Cornwall", *Jerusalem Post Magazine* (11 March 2011): 12, 14.

and “cinematograph” shows held occasionally in rented premises. With 15 shillings that he had saved, Bertie purchased a roll of celluloid film measuring 45 feet in length, and running for less than a minute, in which King Edward VII could be seen opening Parliament. This he managed to hire out in different locations for several weeks, the modest profit – and cash borrowed from his family – enabling him to begin operating Southport’s “New Electric Theatre”, with daily performances, at the end of November 1909. It was a short-lived venture, prompting him to turn from exhibiting to renting films. Within a period of twelve months, Bertie developed his Royal Film Agency, made successful business deals with Pathé, Vitagraph and other leading companies, advertised first-class new productions for hire and (with his mother and sister) transferred their home and firm to Birmingham. There they conducted a growing rental business and joined the old-established Singer’s Hill Hebrew Congregation.

What proved to be a turning point in Bertie Samuelson’s career resulted from a chance remark by his brother, Julian, who was running a theatrical agency in London at the time. One Sunday afternoon in May 1912, while visiting and having tea with his family at their new home in Edgbaston, Julian asked Bertie why he had not thought of making a picture of his own. “There’s nothing I’d like more”, Bertie replied. “I think I *could* make a successful picture, but I’d need a good strong story – something with a broad canvas as a background”. Various ideas were suggested, Julian proposed filming “the more swashbuckling episodes of the Bible”, but it was finally Bertie himself, deep in thought, who snapped his fingers and exclaimed: “I’ve got it! The life of Queen Victoria, it will make a wonderful story – adventure, historical incidents, drama, wars, romance – everything you could ask for”. Those present agreed and Bertie started making arrangements for such a production on the following day. (There is no mention in *Bertie* of *Les amours de la Reine Élisabeth* (or *Queen Elizabeth*, 1912), a 44-minute French production, based on a play by Émile Moreau, with the title role played by an aging Sarah Bernhardt. Though poorly filmed, it enabled moviegoers to see “the divine Sarah” transposed from stage to screen. Imported to the US by Adolph Zukor and Daniel Frohman, this film had its American première in July 1912; shown in “respectable” theatres and reviewed in “quality” newspapers, it induced Zukor to declare that motion pictures had become “a legitimate art form”. G. B. Samuelson’s first production, made well over a year later, and his subsequent career in films may thus have derived some inspiration from Zukor’s success in exploiting *La Reine Élisabeth*.)¹⁷

Making this film required a large capital investment and the use of studio facilities in London, prompting Bertie to contact a business associate, Will

¹⁷ *Bertie*, 27–32, 68–78.

Barker, who had built his own film studios at Ealing in 1910. Having a taste for spectacle as well as realism, Barker agreed to start work as the co-producer; Sir Herbert Maxwell's book, *Sixty Years A Queen*, published to mark the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, provided the film with its title and the basis of a scenario. Barker and Samuelson both recognized the value of advance publicity: from August to October 1913, *Bioscope* and *The Cinema* told their readers that *Sixty Years A Queen* would be the most ambitious film ever made in England – and one of the most expensive. Outdoor scenes were often shot on location; interiors were reconstructed and ceremonial regalia carefully reproduced; at least 1000 actors and extras were employed; and music drawn from popular tunes of the Victorian era was specially commissioned – one of the early occasions on which a musical score was written to accompany a feature film.

The part of young Victoria was played by a Miss Kastner and of the queen in her later years by Blanche Forsythe and Mrs Henry Lytton. Those figuring in other roles included Gilbert Esmond, Fred Paul, Roy Travers and Rolf Leslie (“a master of make-up” who played no less than 27 different characters, surpassing anything achieved in later years by Alec Guinness). Numerous events in Queen Victoria's reign, from her accession to the throne in 1837 until her death in 1901, were of course portrayed, such as her coronation, the opening of the Great Exhibition, the Indian Mutiny and the Crimean and Boer Wars. According to *The Times* (9 December 1913), life in the trenches of the Crimea was depicted with “almost painful realism” and scenes portraying the royal family's domestic life also won the approval of reviewers.

Sixty Years A Queen ran for 67 minutes and proved to be a commercial triumph. It cost what was then the enormous sum of £12,000, part of which represented Bertie's own investment, but the net profit of 40,000 made him a wealthy man. The film was first screened at the New Gallery, Regent Street, and the Victoria Palace on 8 December 1913; less than a fortnight later, Will Barker introduced and showed it to a private audience at the Hotel Astor in New York. While Barker was visiting the US, Bertie “road-showed” the film through England and Scotland, with Rahleen and her fiancé, Harry Lorie, helping with the publicity and screenings. Although condemned by the Cinema Exhibitors' Association, this innovation resulted in “fantastic” business wherever they went. Unfortunately, however, all that remains of this picture is a 46-second fragment preserved in the Italian Film Archive. (The film's theme obviously inspired two remakes directed by Herbert Wilcox: *Victoria the Great* in 1937, based on a play, uncredited, by Laurence Housman; and *Sixty Glorious Years* in 1938, written by Charles de Grandcourt, Miles Malleon and Sir Robert Vansittart. Anna Neagle as Queen Victoria and Anton Walbrook as Prince Albert starred in both productions.)¹⁸

¹⁸ Bertie, 32 and 1083.

Family affairs

Bertha Samuelson was probably unable to afford the cost of a Jewish education for her three sons after they attained their religious majority. (Lauri was the first boy to celebrate his barmitzvh at Southport’s newly dedicated synagogue in 1893. There is a photograph of him, wearing a top hat and silk *tallit*, at about that time. Whether his two brothers also had a barmitzvh celebration is not clear.)¹⁹ Her daughter, Rahleen, however, was sent to a boarding school for Jewish girls at Kew, where one of her teachers was the Reverend Michael Adler, DSO (1868–1944), the minister of the Hammersmith Synagogue and an Anglo-Jewish historian, who had served as the senior Jewish chaplain to the British armed forces during the First World War.²⁰ He later married Bertha Lorie, an older sister of Rahleen’s husband, Harry Lorie. Defying his mother, Lauri Wylie married a non-Jewess in 1904, whereupon Bertha Samuelson demonstratively “sat *shivah*”. This had its effect on Julian and Bertie, as events would prove. Julian also “married out”, in 1918, but evidently took care not to do so during Bertha Samuelson’s lifetime (an announcement of her death in the *Jewish Chronicle* in 1918, inserted by all four children, mentions the observance of a “shiva at 41 Sandon Road, Birmingham”).²¹ He must also have remained a professing Jew: when Julian died in 1934, the Reverend Adler was asked to conduct the Orthodox funeral service at Willesden cemetery (it was attended by 1000 mourners who included “in addition to relatives and personal friends, numerous members of the theatrical and vaudeville profession”).²²

Born in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales, Harry Lorie (1877–1966) would no doubt have pleased Bertha Samuelson as a son-in-law. His family claimed descent from Rabbi Shlomo Luria (Maharshah), a famous Talmudic commentator of the sixteenth century. One of six children, Harry had been on active service during the Boer War and his main occupation was that of an auctioneer. Following their move to Birmingham, the Lories became friendly with the Samuelsons, which is how Rahleen and Harry came to meet and fall in love. After their marriage, they appear to have become the Samuelson family’s religious conscience. The wedding took place on 7 April 1914 at the Singer’s Hill Synagogue in Birmingham. It was a magnificent affair, with 400 guests present at the ceremony and no less than four reverend gentlemen, headed by Rabbi Dr Joshua Abelson and Dr Abraham Cohen, officiating.

Bertie engaged his friend, Will Barker, to film highlights of this event and the arrangements were made with their characteristic panache. Everything

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰ *EJ* 2: 283.

²¹ *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *JC*; 5 April 1918).

²² *Ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1934.

was timed like a military operation: the bride and bridegroom were both filmed leaving home and arriving at the synagogue, where the *huppah* commenced at 1.30 p.m. By 2.45 p.m. the cameraman was boarding the London train and at about 5 p.m. he deposited the film at Barker's studios for developing and printing. The processed (800-foot) reel was then returned to Birmingham on the 6.45 p.m. train and shown to the guests at 9 p.m. after dinner at the Grand Hotel. How many weddings could be filmed and screened with such rapidity even today?

The Worton Hall era (1914–1928)

The record-breaking success of his first production enabled Bertie to set up his own film company while the Royal Film Agency continued operating in Birmingham. George Pearson, who had worked for Pathé, was recruited as Bertie's film director, after which the new magnate acquired Worton Hall and its nine-acre estate at Isleworth, near Richmond, where many indoor and outdoor filming possibilities existed. It had ground-floor dressing rooms, offices and a canteen, with bedrooms upstairs for people who needed to stay overnight. The Samuelson Film Manufacturing Company's new studios were opened on 1 July 1914 by Vesta Tilley, the 50-year-old music hall star and male impersonator, whose husband, Walter de Frece, a noted songwriter and impresario, chaired the celebration. (There is a mistaken belief that Vesta Tilley was Jewish, probably because her husband was a Jew by birth. The fact that he came of a Liverpool theatrical family may explain his association with Bertie. Knighted in 1919, he served as a Conservative M.P. in 1920–31. By an odd coincidence, Elias Samuelson, Bertie's uncle, was engaged to design Tilley's stage costumes after he transferred his business to London.) Three days earlier, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian throne, had been assassinated – a dire event which led to the First World War – and, with this in mind, Bertie Samuelson delivered an emotional, patriotic speech.

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities in August, Bertie produced *The Great European War*, a 20-minute fictitious newsreel completed in a matter of days. Since British moviegoers were yet to learn about the horrors of trench warfare, they gave this patriotic film an enthusiastic reception and new sequences were then added. By the end of September an expanded version was also released. "Bertie was renowned for his frenetic energy. In addition to running his film rental business in Birmingham and his film studios in South London, he organized, ran and funded a Birmingham division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade". He also headed the Cinematograph Trade Ambulance Fund.

Meanwhile, the company had begun work on *A Study in Scarlet*, an

adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s novel and one of the early film versions of a Sherlock Holmes mystery. James Braginton, a member of the office staff in Birmingham, was cast as the famous detective, because (while lacking experience as an actor) he looked and played the part splendidly. One technical problem had to be overcome: the Worton Hall studios were not yet complete. Scenes representing the Mormon “covered wagon trek” over the Rockies to Utah were accordingly filmed by George Pearson at the Cheddar Gorge in Somerset, while the desert scenes were shot by Bertie and an assistant among the sand dunes of his home town, Southport. All this needed considerable organizing and at Southport many extras had to be drawn from the local (and more distant) population. Released at the end of December 1914, *A Study in Scarlet* was enthusiastically reviewed by the critics. (As its opening item in January 2008, the Bioscope Festival of Lost Films advertised what could only have been an imaginary re-screening of this picture, at a long vanished theatre in London.)²³ Moss Empires, who later handled many other Samuelson features, paid a record sum for the UK rights.

This film was the first of a long series directed by George Pearson and his eventual replacements. So relentless was the speed of production that Pearson left for Gaumont after just over a year, compelling Alexander Butler, Fred Paul, Rex Wilson and others to take over as directors. A number of Samuelson films were adaptations of popular classics, novels such as *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1915) and *Little Women* (1917) or plays like J. M. Barrie’s *The Admirable Crichton* (1918) and W. S. Houghton’s *Hindle Wakes* (1918), a story of class prejudice that broke all attendance records in the English Midlands (Michael Balcon’s remake of this film was released in 1931). For *The Valley of Fear* (1916), another Sherlock Holmes mystery, the great detective was played by H. A. Saintsbury, who had already made more than 1000 stage appearances in that role. *Milestones* (1916), based on a play by Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock, has often been hailed as Bertie’s finest achievement.

Not all the films were based on classics, however: *The Girl Who Loves a Soldier* (1917) featured Vesta Tilley, who could still appear convincingly as a young girl; one of her best-known songs was worked into the musical accompaniment. Bertie assembled a group of actors and actresses who made regular appearances in his films. They included Isobel Elsom, Campbell Gullan, Peggy Hyland, Owen Nares and Tom Reynolds, who were later joined by Lillian Hall-Davis, a former beauty queen (unable to make the transition to talking pictures, she committed suicide at the age of 35 in London in October 1933).

Midway through the “War to end all Wars”, British government policy

²³ Bioscope Festival of Lost Films, London, 14 Jan. 2008.

was suddenly reversed and a 1916 Order in Council prohibited the export of films without a special licence. This had a disastrous effect on the British film industry, which lost the dominant position it had held, together with France, in the world market.²⁴ At that time, however, Bertie's company was in a healthier economic position than many others in the UK and he was able to produce *The Sorrows of Satan* (1916) and *My Lady's Dress* (1917), two films starring Gladys Cooper, as well as *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, The Elder Miss Blossom* and other films in 1918. During the next two years he made more than 30 pictures, ranging from *Quinney's* to *The Magistrate*, which were adapted from stage plays. *Damaged Goods* (1919), based on a French drama by Eugène Brieux, reflected war experiences and displayed considerable moral courage, since it tackled the problem of venereal disease resulting from promiscuity. Although endorsed by liberal churchmen and Members of Parliament, it had mixed reviews and the newly established British Board of Film Censors refused to grant it a certificate.

During the period immediately after the war, difficulties were encountered by the British film industry, mainly due to competition from the US, where "big money" was available for lavish productions. Having anticipated this development, Bertie organized the first visit to Hollywood by a group of British actors and technicians, after contracting to make a series of films there. The party, which included Rahleen and Harry Lorie, set sail aboard the *Empress of France* on 14 November 1919 and, after disembarking at Quebec, had a narrow escape from death when their train ran into a blizzard and collided with another express train en route to Montreal. The Lories refused to travel any further than Chicago but a warm reception and useful publicity awaited the rest of the party when they finally reached Los Angeles. Bertie made six movies in just four months at Brunton Studios, Universal City, including *The Night Riders*, *Love in the Wilderness* and *The Ugly Duckling*, but his aim to produce more films on a return visit was never realized.

After work began once more at Worton Hall, the company made sport the theme of various pictures. *The Winning Goal* (1921) had 22 British football internationals in the cast but aroused criticism because of a "gratuitously brutal" episode; *Pride of the Fancy* (1921) and *The Knock-Out* (1923) introduced a war hero, Captain Rex Davis, MC, in the role of a boxer; and *Stable Companions* (1923) was a drama of the turf. By contrast, several films released in 1922 – such as *The Honeypot* and *Mr Pim Passes By* (a screen version of the play by A. A. Milne) – dealt with the husband-and-wife relationship.

Industrial unrest, beginning with a railwaymen's strike in September 1919 and spreading to miners in the Welsh pits, led to a downturn in the film business. The threat of a nationwide road and rail strike in 1921 prompted Bertie

²⁴ Shipman, *Story of Film*, 187.

to invest precious funds in an ill-advised venture, the Samuelson Transport Company, which by the end of July had expanded to a fleet of 99 motor coaches and 56 luggage vans running between London and a number of coastal resorts. Most of these vehicles had been acquired on hire purchase and, when the threatened strike was called off, Bertie's enterprise soon collapsed. In partnership with Sir William Jury, he then returned to movie-making through a new company, British Super Films; but one of its seven productions, *The Right to Strike* (released in 1923), had a left-wing agitator as its villain and aroused working-class resentment because of its (perhaps unintended) anti-Labour slant.

Rising production costs forced Bertie to set up a third and more effective company, Napoleon Films, in November 1922. *A Royal Divorce* (1923), filmed in England, France and Austria, utilized his original techniques and ambitious approach, turning the life of Napoleon Bonaparte into a 150-minute screen "epic" that portrayed the Emperor's campaigns, triumphs and last exile after Waterloo. An international cast was engaged; a small army of carpenters and artists reconstructed Moscow; and entire British regiments, as well as 2000 unemployed ex-servicemen, took part in the battle scenes. One unpublicized event that occurred during the filming in Europe involved a large crowd of half-frozen actors who took refuge in the Palace of Fontainebleau and nearly set it ablaze when they lit a bonfire to keep warm. Although film critics agreed that the picture was too long (it finally ran to 100 minutes in Britain), highly favourable reviews appeared in *The Times* and other newspapers. (Renamed *Napoleon and Josephine*, the film was cut to 73 minutes for screening in the US and Canada, where it made \$11,500 from one week's presentation in Washington, DC alone.) As it turned out, *A Royal Divorce* was Bertie's last commercial success.

The screen version of Leoncavallo's opera *Pagliacci* (1923–24) also created a judicious blend of drama and spectacle but producing this film must have been an enormous challenge due to the lack of sound. Shot mostly on location in Italy, the production overran its budget, compelling Bertie to solve the problem in a typically unorthodox way. After a hectic rail journey to Paris, he went to the Sporting Club, tried his luck at *chemin de fer* and managed to win nearly £3000, thus enabling him to cover the picture's deficit. Always ready to experiment with a new technique, he gave audiences an unexpected thrill when they discovered that one sequence of *Pagliacci* had been filmed in Prizma colour.

In common with *Damaged Goods* four years earlier, however, two more "problem" films gave rise to widespread criticism in 1923. A book written by Dr Marie Stopes was the source of *Married Love*, which emphasized the need for sex education and birth control. This picture met with strong objections from the Catholic Church and it was only after an agreement with the British

film censors that its release was permitted under a new title, *Maisie's Marriage*. Further controversy was aroused by *Should a Doctor Tell?*, which tackled the issue of doctor–patient confidentiality. A British Lion remake of this film (1930) made use of the original story by G. B. Samuelson and Walter Summers, also providing Anna Neagle with a key role. Like some of his Hollywood contemporaries, Bertie had the knack of discovering potential movie stars. Those who made their screen debut in his films included Gladys Cooper, John Gielgud, Roger Livesey, C. Aubrey Smith, Godfrey Tearle and Kay Walsh.

Even with his experience as a film producer, Bertie Samuelson was anything but a ladies' man. When he first met his wife-to-be, Marjorie Vint (1901–1989), she was a sixteen-year-old waitress at the Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly. He felt that she had the makings of a star and gave her a screen test at Worton Hall but then lost sight of her for a few years. Marjorie's father had been a mercantile officer in Calcutta (Kolkata), India; her mother and two sisters had already appeared on the stage. She began her acting career as an understudy, adopted the stage name of Marjorie Statler and eventually played the role of Mary, Queen of Scots, in *This England*, a historical travelogue which Bertie filmed in October 1923. The role of Edward, Prince of Wales, was assigned to Jessie Matthews, a Jewish teenager from Soho, who later became a famous actress, dancer and singer. After Marjorie and Bertie resumed contact, their friendship blossomed into a permanent romance.²⁵ (As Marjorie Statler, she appeared in three of her husband's films: *This England*, *She* and *For Valour*.)

They now had to face an obvious problem: Marjorie was a Gentile. Recalling his late mother's stern rejection of intermarriage, Bertie dreaded the prospect of Rahleen following Bertha's example by "sitting *shivah*" for him as well. Accordingly, his intended wife agreed to embrace Judaism and application was made to the London Beth Din for an Orthodox *giyyur*. Years later, Marjorie called to mind the instruction she received: "I had to learn Hebrew, which was far from easy. Certainly, nothing was made easy for me . . . Orthodox Judaism did not strive particularly hard to obtain converts. In fact, it seemed to me that every possible obstacle was being placed in my path (though, of course, looking back, this may well have been to test my sincerity). The final examination by six stern-looking Rabbis was not far short of a nightmare. What pulled me through? – stubborn perseverance and my love for Bertie!"²⁶ Having successfully passed her tests, Marjorie accompanied him on a business trip to the US and Canada in the autumn of 1923, with her mother serving as chaperone. Bertie made an additional arrangement during that tour: "I married my wife three times, on consecutive days. We were in

²⁵ For fuller details see *Bertie*, 342–44 and 457–58.

²⁶ See *Bertie*, 587.

George Berthold Samuelson (1889–1947): Britain's Jewish film pioneer



Plate 1 Portrait of Bertie Samuelson, c. 1911
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 2 Still from *Sixty Years A Queen*, 1913
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson





Plate 3 (top left) Samuelson–Lorie wedding group, Birmingham, 1914

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson

Plate 4 (left) A dramatic scene from *A Study in Scarlet*, 1914

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson

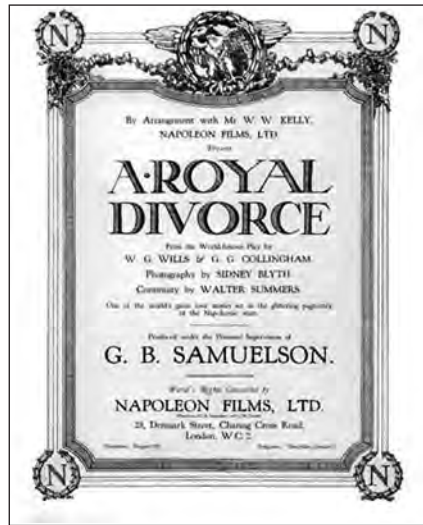
Plate 5 (above) *A Study in Scarlet*: filming the Mormon Trek sequence among the sand dunes at Southport

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 6 Cartoon of Bertie in action, c.1915

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plates 7 and 8 Two advertisements for *A Royal Divorce*, 1923
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 9 Sir John Gielgud's film debut in *The Unwanted*, 1924
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 10 Bertie and Marjorie Samuelson's wedding photograph, 1923
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson

George Berthold Samuelson (1889–1947): Britain's Jewish film pioneer



Plate 11 Filming Sir Henry Rider Haggard's *She* in Berlin, 1925
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 12 Advertisement for *She*, 1926
By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 13 Family photograph,
c. 1926

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 14 Last photograph of Bertie and
Marjorie together, November 1946

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson

Plate 15 RAF Sgt David Samuelson with
his mobile kitbag, 1945

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



George Berthold Samuelson (1889–1947): Britain's Jewish film pioneer



Plate 16 Michael Samuelson with Prince Charles and Princess Diana, c. 1990

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 17 Portrait of Sir Sydney Samuelson

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 18 David Samuelson receiving his Oscar in Hollywood, 2003

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 19 All four Samuelson brothers together in the late 1970s

By courtesy of David W. Samuelson



Plate 20 Memorial window at Southport synagogue

Photo: Arnold Lewis, courtesy of Southport Hebrew Congregation

New York and on the first day we married at the City Hall according to American law. On the second day, we went to the British embassy [consulate] and married according to British law. On the third day, we were married in synagogue in accordance with Jewish rites [that is, ‘according to the Law of Moses and of Israel’]. People in the hotel we stayed at thought we had gone raving mad.”²⁷

Every stage of the relationship – Bertie’s courtship of Marjorie, her conversion and their wedding – had been kept secret and it was not until March 1924, after their return to England, that the facts were revealed to his close relatives. Once she was introduced to them, however, Marjorie made a good impression and was fully accepted by the Samuelson and Lorie families.

Bertie’s decline and fall

A new and more menacing depression hit Britain’s film industry during the second half of 1923, although a few producers (notably Wilcox and Balcon) managed to weather the storm. After making *The Unwanted* and two other pictures, Bertie Samuelson ran into financial difficulties and Napoleon Films collapsed at the end of 1924. Desperate to find another winner, he thought that a new version of Sir Henry Rider Haggard’s *She* (filmed earlier in 1916) offered that prospect. The scheme originated with H. Lisle Lucoque, who had made the original film as well as two other Rider Haggard movies, *Allan Quatermain* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, in 1917. Although bankrupt, Lucoque had succeeded in engaging Leander de Cordova, an experienced (and flamboyant) director, and Betty Blythe, a Hollywood movie star, for the part of Ayesha, “She-Who-Must-Be-Obedyed”. Since he needed a production company and some initial funding, Lucoque asked Bertie to help and he unwisely agreed, partly because the scheme had Rider Haggard’s blessing. Not even Hollywood could provide a studio large enough to accommodate the sets needed for *She* but space was available in Germany and the co-producers then signed a contract whereby Prometheus FV would finance the studio, scenery and stage costs in return for the German distribution rights. Prometheus offered the use of two studios: those of the Europäische Film Allianz (EFA) in central Berlin and of the Zeppelinhalle in outlying Spandau, which boasted the world’s largest floor-space of nearly 15,000 square metres.

That was Bertie’s first mistake. The second was engaging and working with the self-centred Betty Blythe, whose recurrent mishaps upset the production schedule. The third and worst of all was risking most of the Samuelson family’s capital to pay for salaries, film stock and laboratory charges (amounting to some £10,000). Work proceeded in January and

²⁷ See *Bertie*, 587.

February 1925 but was dogged by one misfortune after another and had to be completed in north Wales. Rider Haggard, who apparently wrote the subtitles, was no admirer of “the Huns” and told his friend Rudyard Kipling about German efforts to impound the negative for alleged debts. He died on 14 May 1925, less than a fortnight before the trade show. Bertie’s 105-minute film had mixed reviews after its release in January 1926 and did not live up to his expectations. A doubtful enterprise from the very start, *She* was a financial disaster, involving him in legal actions and adverse publicity from which he never recovered.²⁸

Bertie persevered, though short of cash, with what became known as “quota quickies” – a dozen one-reel films in each presentation. They included two series of *Twisted Tales* that were released in 1926. He then tried to stage a comeback with three “patriotics” entitled *Land of Hope and Glory*, *Motherland* and *For Valour*. Thanks to his former prestige, Bertie managed to persuade Sir Edward Elgar to conduct the musical prologue when *Land of Hope and Glory* had its trade show on Armistice Day, 11 November 1927. Although his method of production was now judged to be old-fashioned, the second and third of these films call for attention because of their Jewish interest. The story of *Motherland*, written by Bertie and Marjorie Samuelson, deals with three families – one Protestant, one Catholic and one Jewish – whose sons meet in the trenches during the Great War. After Ikey Abrahamson is posted “killed in action”, a Christian girl visits his parents, tells them she is his wife and declares that she intends to embrace Judaism. The Abrahamsons welcome her and then, after the Armistice, Ikey returns alive and well, having been a severely wounded prisoner. Critics pointed to the innovatory stress laid on the Jewish family, their home life and religious ceremonial. *Kine-Weekly* appreciated the light relief and pathos mingled in these scenes, while *The Cinema* predicted that the Jewish emphasis would guarantee the film’s popularity “in certain districts”.²⁹ (This dénouement runs counter to the assimilationist line of Hollywood movies, in which “good” screen Jews discarded their religious values and practice in order to merge with the world of Americanism [and find attractive Gentile partners]. Two late examples of that trend are *The Jolson Story* [1946] and *Jolson Sings Again* [1949]. In the first movie, Cantor Yoelson [Al Jolson’s father] is a strictly Orthodox Jew; in the second, he discards his *yarmulka*, dances with his son’s Gentile wife and eats whatever is set before him.)

The film *For Valour* (1928), written, produced and directed by G. B. Samuelson, made imaginative use of a television-age framework to relate the story of the Victoria Cross and its notable recipients. Leonard Keyser, VC,

²⁸ For this and the Blythe vs. Samuelson High Court battle (April 1926, which vindicated the producer’s character), see *Bertie*, 676–85 and 694–705.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 716.

one of the five Jews who gained this medal during the Great War, played himself in the film. An Australian by birth, he had displayed rare courage during the Gallipoli campaign of 1915, picking up live bombs hurled by the Turks and throwing them back like cricket balls to explode on the enemy side. Unfortunately, when this scene was re-enacted for the camera, a “dummy” charge exploded in Keysor’s face, causing severe injuries for which he was later awarded damages.³⁰ Bertie’s misfortunes led to the sale of his Worton Hall studios in 1928 and to his bankruptcy at the end of 1929.

By then he had directed two pictures based on novels by Edgar Wallace, *The Forger* and *The Valley of Ghosts*. Wallace, the newly appointed chairman of British Lion, had asked him to make these films but the second was badly affected by the arrival of Hollywood “talkies” with *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson, at the forefront. The future of silent pictures was now being questioned and Bertie Samuelson, who “didn’t believe in sound and didn’t make it into sound”,³¹ was henceforth consigned to the fringes of the British film industry. With Sir E. Gordon Craig as producer (or co-producer), he managed to direct eight more pictures, such as *The Wickham Mystery*, *Inquest*, *Matinee Idol* and *Spotting*. A series of 12 “shorts” containing deliberate errors, *Spotting* (1934) was probably written by Bertie himself and included a 13-minute film entitled “Lipsky’s Christmas Dinner” in which a Jewish shopkeeper thwarts a crook’s plan to relieve him of a valuable emerald. *Security*, devised soon after Neville Chamberlain’s Munich agreement with Hitler in September 1938, was never filmed. The antisemitic “foreigner” whose gang victimizes a Jew in this story could well have been a thinly disguised Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Fascists.

A sad end (1930–1947)

Meanwhile, Bertie had to take care of a growing family after his wife gave birth to David (in 1924), Sydney (in 1925) and Neville Anthony (in 1929). In order to earn a living, he set about inventing various domestic products together with a story book that combined the text in front with a “pop-up” toy theatre at the back. This was patented by Marjorie in 1930, as her husband was only discharged from his bankruptcy in March 1931, a few weeks after Michael, their youngest son, was born. The Samuelsons had a comfortable home in Hendon but economic pressure forced them to let it and move to Worthing on the Sussex coast in 1933. There Bertie set up a number of “tuppence a week” lending libraries that ensured him a reasonable income for the next few years. This improvement in their situation enabled Bertie,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 717–18 and 780–82; see also *EJ* 11: 1553–54.

³¹ David Samuelson, interview with the author, June 1994.

Marjorie and the two younger boys to return to London. David and Sydney remained as boarders at Shoreham Grammar School but went home by train each weekend. One thing is clear: both parents took the Jewish training of their children very seriously. “Although we were the only two Jewish boys in the school”, David recalls, “we still managed to observe the Jewish laws we did at home . . . We always had cereals for breakfast instead of bacon and egg and avoided other forbidden foods; we each wore *tsitsis* and covered our heads at night with our hands when we said our prayers”. According to Sydney, “Morning assembly was fairly religious-oriented, and my father was not happy about our attending. The school’s problem was what to do with us during the ten-minute assembly and the following half-hour of Religious Instruction, and so we spent this extra time each morning at woodwork.” David Samuelson wryly observed that “while the rest of the school learned about Jesus Christ, we learned his trade”.³²

After the lending library scheme proved a failure, Marjorie and her children returned to the south coast, where she opened a wool shop at Shoreham-by-Sea in 1937. Bertie, the man whom others remembered as a generous friend, colleague or employer, was now ready to accept any job – from editing British Lion films (1938–40) to working far away in a Glasgow amusement park. “Throughout all the lean times”, David affirms, “my parents never totally lost sight of their faith. My mother invariably lit candles on Friday night, we never had the forbidden foods in our house or ate them when we were out, my father always observed his mother’s *yahrzeit* on the anniversary of her death [*erev Pesah*], we observed Passover . . . and fasted on Yom Kippur, even though we lived many miles from the nearest synagogue”.³³

A traumatic experience put their faith to a severe test, which David has described:

As the time approached for my barmitzvah, Sydney and I used to travel by train to the Holland Road (Orthodox) Synagogue, Hove, on Sunday mornings to attend *cheder* . . . On one of his infrequent visits to London, and although he could ill afford them, my father brought me back a *tallis* [prayer shawl] and a pair of *tefillin* [prayer accessories], all in preparation for the great day. Then, one Saturday morning, Sydney and I went there to attend the Sabbath service. Immediately after the service the rabbi, Rabbi [Berel] Wilner, came rushing out of the synagogue to catch up with us in the entrance hall as we were leaving. “How did you boys get here?” he demanded to know. We were honest (and naïve) and replied “We came by train.” He then said, “Well, I would rather you didn’t come.” Sydney and I, and our parents, were devastated. We never went to that synagogue again. Sydney and I never had barmitzvahs, neither did Tony

³² Bertie, 851, 856.

³³ Ibid., 868.

or Michael, and we were never able to mix with the Jewish community until many years later when we were in the RAF – and Bertie was denied the joy of seeing his sons “barmitzvahed”. [David Samuelson added that he “put matters right” by having a long-delayed barmitzvah celebration on his eightieth birthday in 2004.]³⁴

In his zeal to uphold Sabbath observance, Rabbi Wilner clearly forgot Hillel’s gentler way of “drawing people near to the Torah” (*Avot* 1:12). Clearly, making some discreet enquiries and arranging for the boys to receive home hospitality over Shabbat never occurred to this shortsighted *Rav*; as a result, he might well have driven a whole family out of the Jewish (let alone Orthodox) fold. Attitudes have fortunately changed since then.

Soon after war broke out in 1939, Bertie Samuelson was given a new job as the supervisor of two film storage depots at Great Barr, near Birmingham. For anyone with his background in the film industry it would have been a thankless task; but for Bertie, a diabetic weighing about 280 pounds, such a lonely existence must have been heartbreaking. Rarely able to see his wife and children, he fell ill and died in his sleep on the morning of 17 April 1947, when he was scheduled to enter hospital.³⁵ David Samuelson, then serving with the Royal Air Force in West Germany, flew home on compassionate leave and had to deal with a serious problem. His father had expressed a wish to be cremated but the Lories, Rahleen and Harry, were upset and strongly objected on Orthodox religious grounds. David remembers going to see Rabbi Israel Brodie, the Senior Jewish Chaplain, whom he had often met in the past (and who succeeded Dr J. H. Hertz as Britain’s Chief Rabbi in the following year), to know how he should proceed in the circumstances. David’s account of the interview is rather surprising: “[Rabbi Brodie] was in no doubt and said that if it was the wish of the deceased and his widow that he should be cremated, then that is what should happen. I recall him taking a book off the bookshelf and showing me a passage which justified his advice. I was then able to tell the Lories that what we were doing was correct. They said they would like to arrange a memorial service at a later date, but I don’t think they ever did.”³⁶ Now, although the United Synagogue’s *hevra kad-disha* had at one time permitted the burial of a cremated Jew if the ashes were first placed in a coffin, this was no longer the practice and it is hard to believe that Rabbi Brodie would have told anyone that cremation was halakhically permissible. David described the final scene: “I then went to Perry Barr, where only Sydney, Tony and a couple of locals attended the funeral [which Sydney had arranged with an undertaker]. We had no Minister and I read the

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 868–69.

³⁵ Death announced in the *JC*, 25 April 1947.

³⁶ *Bertie*, 896–97.

funeral service from the Jewish prayer book in English, because my Hebrew was not good enough".³⁷ The fact that no rabbi or "minister" officiated strongly suggests that Rabbi Brodie knew it would be a *goyisher* affair and that whatever advice he gave had been misunderstood.

It was, in any case, a tragic end for the pioneer who had made well over a hundred films, chiefly as their producer but sometimes also as their director.³⁸ His great virtue, courage, was particularly emphasized in a tribute by one of Britain's great film producers, Sir Michael Balcon, whose own career began when Bertie's was already in decline: "Things were not easy in those days, but one always knew that Samuelson would put on a bold face and keep going, come what may. We all knew that he had his disasters, but he always got back – you felt that nothing could knock him down. He was a completely dedicated film man . . . Samuelson and a few contemporaries were the nucleus upon which the present [British] industry is based . . . If I were asked to pick the character of my day in the film industry, I would say, without hesitation, that it was G. B. Samuelson."³⁹

In the twilight of his life, when he was regarded as a failure and all his achievements seemed a thing of the past, Bertie wrote: "The curtain is down, the cameras are silent, the film has faded out – but who knows? At some future date a new generation of Wylie-Samuelsons may carry on the traditions for their uncle and their father; then the curtain will rise again, the cameras will grind and the film will fade in".⁴⁰ It was an astonishingly prophetic remark.

Epilogue: the Samuelson dynasty

"If you must go into the film business", Bertie told his eldest son, "be a technician, not a producer. Let other people worry about the money". It was sound advice. In 1939 Bertie wrote a letter to his old associate, Sir E. Gordon Craig, the managing director of British Movietone News, asking if he could find a job for David Samuelson, who was still only 14. "Wait until he's 16", Craig replied, "then write again". That is how David began training as a cameraman in 1941. Two years later he joined the Royal Air Force, served as a flight engineer until 1947 and then resumed his career with Movietone.

Like David, Sydney Samuelson also worked as a cameraman after serving

³⁷ *Bertie*, 897.

³⁸ Most of these films have been lost but they are fully catalogued by David Samuelson in *Bertie*, 1041–82. A small number are preserved in the National Film and Television Archive. The fragment of *Sixty Years A Queen* is mentioned above. Ten complete films have survived, including *Damaged Goods*, *Maisie's Marriage* and (by a lucky chance) *She*. Of others, such as *Motherland*, only sections remain.

³⁹ Quoted in *Bertie*, 903–04.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 905.

in the RAF and first went into business hiring out his equipment when it was not required. He and his two younger brothers, Neville Anthony (Tony, 1929–2010) and Michael Edward (1931–1998), each invested £100 in a family enterprise originally known as Samuelson Film Service, which became the world’s largest rental agency for motion picture and television equipment. Each of the brothers had a specific role in the company – Sydney as chairman and managing director, Michael as joint managing director and Tony as the one dealing with financial and legal matters. David left Movietone in 1960 to become Samuelson’s director of engineering. By 1980, the Samuelson Group occupied a large site in the north-west London district of Cricklewood, employing a staff of 400, with branches in France and Australia.⁴¹ Film credits in major productions acknowledged the services rendered by the group, which was finally absorbed by the Birmingham Eagle Trust conglomerate in 1987 after a takeover estimated at some 38–48 million.

Bertie’s widow, Marjorie Samuelson, who naturally took pride in their achievements, died at the age of 88, with all her wits about her and the joy of having great-grandchildren.⁴²

The four Samuelson brothers gained distinction in various fields, public as well as private. While performing his National Service, Michael learned skills in the photographic section of the RAF which proved useful when he worked for Movietone and the Samuelson Group, producing many Olympic Games and World Cup soccer films. He was elected the president of Variety Club International in 1980 and raised millions of pounds for children’s charities, often in cooperation with Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Awarded a CBE in 1989, he died at the early age of 67.⁴³ Tony qualified as a barrister at the age of 19 but could not practise law for another two years, by which time (as an army officer) he had defended other national servicemen at courts martial. Flying was his hobby: in 1969 he was the joint winner of a transatlantic air race for light aircraft; he also collected vintage fighter planes and at one time owned two Spitfires and one of the three surviving Hurricanes.

A permanent trustee of BAFTA, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, Sydney has received many honours including a CBE in 1978 and the Michael Balcon award in 1985. He became the first British Film Commissioner in 1991, responsible for attracting overseas film productions to the UK, and received a knighthood in 1995 for his “services to the British Film Commission”. As a loyal Jew, Sir Sydney has headed the British Friends of Akim, Israel’s Society for the rehabilitation of mentally handicapped children, presided over Jewish film festivals and denounced a leftist

⁴¹ See James Clement ‘Has Anyone Not Heard of Samuelsons?’, *British Journal of Photography* (Feb. 1981).

⁴² Death announced in the *JC* (28 April 1989).

⁴³ Death announced in the *JC* (4 Sept. 1998); obituary in the *JC* two weeks later.

trade union ban on accepting film work in Israel. About 20 years ago, an evocative “This Is Your Life” programme was devoted to him on British television. Two of his sons, Peter (1951–) and Marc (1961–), established Samuelson Productions Ltd in 1990, thus continuing the family tradition.

David Samuelson developed the “Candid Camera” technique for ABC Television and filmed the “World in Action” documentaries for Granada. Over the years, he also helped to film Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, three royal weddings, the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill and other important events. In 1968 he made a special documentary about Carmel College, the now defunct Jewish public school, in which “a lot of sophisticated techniques” were employed.⁴⁴ The photographic processes that he invented secured his election to the British Screen Advisory Council, the Royal Television Society and the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. For the remote-control head of the Louma camera crane – a technical innovation that “changed the way films are made” – David was awarded an Oscar in 2003. (This device was used in the making of *Gandhi*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and other pictures.) He has also devoted time to researching the Samuelson family’s history and to publishing an illustrated record of his career in films.⁴⁵

Professional success is not everything, however: only David and Sydney married within the Jewish community (they belong to Reform synagogues in London) and only Sydney’s grandchildren are halakhically Jews. The rest, in David’s words, are all “mixed up” and his own two sons, Paul Julian (1956–) and Adam Wolf (1961–), though educated at Carmel College, chose to “marry out”. Michael’s younger daughter, the actress Emma Samms (1960–), who starred in *Dynasty* and other television productions, has divorced all three of her Gentile husbands. Because of her “English Rose” good looks, she received two offers to feature as a *Playboy* centre-fold and rejected them both.

In April 1996, David and Sir Sydney together with Michael and Tony (who were then alive) and about 30 other Samuelsons – including family members who had flown in from New York and Los Angeles – paid a nostalgic visit to Bertie’s home town, Southport. A double commemoration was held there as a prelude to nationwide events marking the British film industry’s centenary. The Samuelsons had reserved a whole railway coach for their journey but the train did not arrive on time at Liverpool Lime Street, nearly disrupting their schedule.⁴⁶ Once they reached Southport, a plaque recording G. B. Samuelson’s contribution to British movie-making was affixed to the old family home in Nevill Street. Later, as the *Jewish Chronicle*

⁴⁴ Report in the *JC*. (2 Aug. 1968).

⁴⁵ His 54-page work is subtitled *A Life Behind and Among the Cameras* (2010).

⁴⁶ *JC* (3 May 1996): 30.

reported,⁴⁷ a memorial window bearing the names of Henschel and Bertha Samuelson was unveiled at the Southport Hebrew Congregation’s Arnside Road synagogue. “It’s a very exciting day for all of us”, Sir Sydney Samuelson, the British Film Commissioner, declared. His sentiments were echoed by the mayor of Sefton, who hosted a town hall reception for the family.

At a luncheon in the synagogue hall, David Samuelson, the eldest of the four brothers, told the guests how a week earlier he had discovered a beautifully bound *siddur* presented to his uncle, Laurence Samuelson, on the occasion of his barmitzvah in 1893. This happened to be the Southport community’s first barmitzvah celebration, as noted earlier. Fittingly, David now returned the *siddur* to the congregation. “To go back to one’s roots is something everyone should do from time to time”, he observed. “It is a voyage of discovery”.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.