

in those days. The main source of films, then as now, 'was America. Hollywood was flooding this new market. To protect British film-makers, the quota system was introduced. For every American made film, there had to be a British made one on the same bill. What a good time it was to get started in the film business. I was lucky.

In reality, the quota system was an exercise in cynicism. The films made under it were only an hour long and very cheap. Budgets, calculated at a pound a foot, usually came out at £5,000 per film, while the schedule was ten days. Quality was not important. The films didn't necessarily have to be distributed to qualify. They had to be shown but, if a film wasn't considered good enough for distribution, one showing would do. This could well take place in the morning before an audience of half a dozen people who hadn't paid, or even for the cleaners. To rich Hollywood studios, losing a few thousand on such a film was considered worth it. A big budget feature of theirs with popular American stars could absorb the sum easily, and so, 20th Century-Fox established Fox-British at Wembley Studios. From there they sent out a stream of these short films which became known as Quota Quickies. For British film companies they were a bandwagon and those companies jumped on it.

Despite the low budgets and short schedules, some Quota Quickies did achieve distribution and a few made handsome profits. So this system, cynical and cut-throat as it was, at least provided work for British crews and, better than that, a good training ground for directors, technicians and actors. The director Anthony Asquith began his career on Quota Quickies, as did another, Michael Powell. I was in one of his.

It was a typical Quota Quickie where, at the end of the ten day schedule, if you hadn't finished you either worked on through