

Note on the History of 20th Century Fox Film Corporation in Soho

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20th Century Fox, History and Technical Advances

20th Century Fox came into being in 1935 when Twentieth Century and the William Fox Film Corporation joined forces. The latter company started film production in the Nickelodeon days in 1912 and despite a turbulent financial history Fox (later 20th Century Fox) was regarded as a technically pioneering film production company with an outstanding reputation.

William Fox Corporation, later 20th Century Fox, was one of the top seven Hollywood film production companies, the others being RKO Pictures and Universal founded in 1912, United Artists in 1919; Warner Brothers 1923; MGM 1924; and Columbia Pictures also in 1924.

When Warner Brothers introduced the first sound films on the "Vitaphone" sound-on-disk system in 1926/27, Fox (in association with General Electric) immediately responded with "Movietone" sound-on-film system. This was the first popular sound system to employ a sound track directly on film.

Many years later, to counter the negative effect that television was having on cinema attendance, 20th Century Fox introduced for the first time "Cinemascope", a wide screen process based on an anamorphic system of lenses. Their production "*The Robe*" received its first screening in New York in September 1953.

20th Century Fox's Productions, Stars and Directors

From 1935, 20th Century Fox pursued an ambitious programme of first rate film production that was both creatively and technically of a very high standard - as any list of their films will show:-

Musicals - *Carousel, The King and I, South Pacific, Hello Dolly, The Sound of Music*

Social Dramas - *Gentleman's Agreement, Snake Pit, Boomerang, Razor's Edge, How Green Was My Valley, The Grapes of Wrath*

Large Productions - *Cleopatra, The Longest Day, Paton, Towering Inferno, Mash, Titanic*

Lasting Themes - *Planet of the Apes, Die Hard, Avatar, Star Wars* (one of the all time box office successes)

Fox made stars of many actors including:-

Marilyn Monroe;

Gregory Peck;

Henry Fonda;

Warner Baxter;

Tyrone Power;

Richard Widmark; and

Shirley Temple.

and in earlier days:-

Theda Bara;

William Farnum; and

Tom Mix.

Many of Hollywood's leading directors regularly worked for 20th Century Fox including Raoul Walsh and Frank Borzage, Ernst Lubitsch, Joseph Mankiewicz, Otto Preminger, Henry King, Henry Hathaway, Anatole Litvak, Elia Kazan. John Ford, regarded as one of the most important and influential film makers, made many of his best films working for the company. More recent directors include James Cameron (*Titanic* and *Avatar*) and George Lucas (*Star Wars*).

In the 1920s Fox brought F. W. Murnau, one of the world's most prominent directors, to Hollywood to make "*Sunrise*", one of the classics of world cinema.

20th Century Fox in Soho

In the year 1945 over 1,464 million people went to the cinema in Great Britain. The distribution and exhibition of almost all feature films was managed in Soho. 20th Century Fox headquarters in Soho Square was supported by eight branch offices in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

20th Century Fox diversified its activities to include television. Over the years 20th Century Fox maintained a considerable interest in the British Film Industry, producing many British made films including co-production of *Chariots of Fire*..

All this sustained activity over the years has meant that the 20th Century Fox Soho Square building has fulfilled an important role in one of Soho's traditional trading activities – the film industry. The present building which sits well in the environs of one of London's oldest squares, has been a meeting place for countless members of the film industry.