General editor's foreword

Unlike other works on British cinema in the Second World War, Richard Farmer's book focuses not primarily on films but on the whole cinemagoing experience. Cinema going had become established as 'the essential social habit of the age' by 1939 and it continued throughout the war to provide a source of entertainment, information, escape and emotional comfort, but under drastically altered conditions. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, including newspapers, the trade press, fan magazines, police reports, Mass-Observation, oral history interviews, industry and government records, Farmer analyses and recreates with vivid immediacy the changes effected in the cinemagoing experience by the onset of war. He charts the impact of the blackout, air raids, child evacuation, transport restrictions and the introduction of Double Summer Time on shows and audiences. He examines the influence of the government on the exhibition industry, in particular the Ministry of Information, with its programme of official film propaganda, the Ministry of Food with its 'Food Flashes' and sweet rationing and the Treasury deriving revenue from Entertainments Tax. He analyses the changes in male and female staff, with conscription thinning their ranks, clothes rationing affecting their uniforms and women training as projectionists to replace their male counterparts. He looks at the strategies for promoting films when paper shortages meant fan magazines shrank and merged, the size and number of posters were restricted and advertising space in newspapers was reduced. There was still scope for competitions, stunts and personal appearances as managers' ingenuity and inventiveness were tested to the limit. Among the many incidental details which encapsulate the era are the facts that cinemas could refuse entry to anyone not carrying a gas mask, and there was a ban on the manufacture and sale of ice cream between 1942 and 1945. This thoroughly researched,

fascinating and evocative account represents a significant advance in our understanding of the phenomenon of cinemagoing. By 1946 the cinemas, which had once prided themselves in being luxurious dream palaces, had become shabby and run down. Many of the shortages and restrictions besetting them would persist until the end of the decade. But 1946 was also the year of peak cinema attendance in Britain, eloquent testimony to the captivating power of film.

Jeffrey Richards