

“National Catastrophe” call as UK’s National Film and Television Archive is threatened by drastic cuts

An intriguing – and anonymous – pamphlet recently found its way to the FOCAL office.

Entitled *An Impending National Catastrophe? The Fate of Britain’s Film Heritage*, the document is the collective work of a group of concerned individuals, calling itself The Curatori Lucis (Guardians of the Light) Group, “representing various sectors of the international archive and film history community” and deals with what the authors perceive to be an imminent threat to the National Film and Television Archive collection of material of “irreparable devastation from ill-considered re-conception and restructuring”.

It seems that the Film Council and the British Film Institute, looking for ways of saving money, have decided to impose drastic cuts in the maintenance of the archive. The plan would seek to cut the annual budget by a third, to reduce the specialised staff by about 40 and to sell off the state-of-the-art Getty Conservation Centre at Berkhamsted to realise capital funding.

Calling the plan “inadequately researched and generally misconceived” the authors fear that, if

adopted, it could result in the destruction of much that has been achieved in the NFTVA’s 60 years of collecting and preserving a national heritage that, if it is allowed to wither on the vine for reasons of financial and administrative neatness, can never be replaced.

Out in the open ...and campaigning on the Web

Just before *Archive Zones* went to press, FOCAL International was made aware that the previously anonymous Curatori Lucis (Guardians of the Light) Group had announced the launch of a new campaigning website Film Archive Action, created “to unite international support in defence of the imperilled motion picture heritage”.

“The most acute current crisis”, they say, “is the threat to the National Film and Television Archive.” and they lay the blame firmly at the door of the BFI.

“The British Film Institute, the body currently entrusted with its administration, has drawn up an ill-considered ‘plan’ for financial cut-back and reorganisation of the Archive.

The proposals threaten:

- (a) to dismantle one of the world’s most admired and emulated film conservation units
- (b) to reduce the level of the Archive’s acquisitions and holdings
- (c) to minimise accessibility of the collections
- (d) to introduce new layers of bureaucracy, with poorly defined responsibilities.
- (e) to abandon the Archive’s existence as a national heritage collection, reducing and hijacking it to a purely institutional asset.

The recently appointed new executive of the BFI is also threatening further erosion of the national film heritage, notably the planned transfer of the book library (and perhaps the NFTVA itself) to an institution of higher education. Such a move would be certain to end the ready public access which has made this an unrivalled facility for film students, researchers and journalists for more than half a century.”

Further details can be found at:
www.filmarchiveaction.org