

BFI secures major collection of over 20,000 Central Office of Information films following its closure

28th March 2012

The BFI National Archive will acquire the entire moving image archive of the Central Office of Information (COI) when it is formally wound up on 31st March 2012. This is the largest single collection ever to be acquired by the BFI and all available rights to the material will also pass to the BFI.

Amanda Nevill, Chief Executive, BFI said, “*The COI films are wonderful and important examples of British filmmaking. Often quirky and eccentric these films over the last 66 years tell a rich and diverse stories about British life. The fact that they were used so effectively by Government departments really demonstrates the power that film has in capturing the nation’s attention and influencing Britain and we are very proud that the BFI National Archive is the films new guardian.*”

The BFI has enjoyed a close working relationship with the COI and already holds a large number of COI titles, as part of the Public Records collection preserved in partnership with The National Archives, some of which have been released in a popular series of BFI DVDs: **The COI Collection volumes 1 – 6** since 2010.

The latest addition to the BFI’s DVD releases of films from the COI collections will be released in time for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee with a major collection: **Volume Seven: The Queen on Tour** presents a wealth of wonderful colour footage of the Queen and the Royal Family travelling the world on official visits between 1953 and 1971. The COI – with unprecedented access to the royals – produced the 'official' record of royal tours and state visits and also commissioned and supervised a variety of retrospectives of the Queen and her family.

Highlights from this extraordinary collection of films, many of which were shot in exotic locations, include: *Royal Destiny* (1953), a look at the Queen's early life, made in her coronation year; *The Queen's State Visit to Iran* (1961), a fascinating film of the royal visit to Iran eight years after a British-and American-backed coup installed the Shah; *Sierra Leone Greets the Queen* (1962), a colourful account of the Queen's visit in the year of independence; and *Britain Welcomes the Emperor and Empress of Japan* (1971), a record of the controversial state visit from Emperor Hirohito and his wife.

Many of the UK’s most distinguished filmmakers have worked for the COI such as Peter Greenaway, Ken Loach, Humphry Jennings and Hugh Hudson. Memorable public information campaigns are still resonant decades after their original screenings.

The COI collection charts the attitudes and preoccupations of British society through every decade since 1946 and provides a unique insight into Government’s changing priorities for public information, from simple messages telling children how to cross the road through to more hard-hitting information about how to survive a nuclear bomb.

Originally shown in cinemas, later on television, the films reflect many of the important social issues of their day. Many early COI films dealt with the many consequences of post-war reconstruction. The 1970s saw classic characters like Charley the Cat, Tutfy the Squirrel and the Green Cross Code Man (Dave Prowse) promote personal and road safety, and more recent films have covered important subjects such as climate change and internet safety.

As the successor body to previous Government bodies with film interests - at the General Post Office with its famous GPO Film Unit, then the Ministry of Information and its Crown Film Unit, the COI was set up in 1946. This rich tradition of British public service filmmaking, preserved and curated by the BFI, yielded over 45,000 titles which add up to an irreplaceable picture of British life and manners interpreted through creative filmmaking.

The COI collection will be preserved in the BFI’s state-of-the-art Master Film Store and will continue to be made widely available on multiple platforms. A selection of COI films can be viewed at the BFI’s MediathequeS at QUAD Derby, Wrexham Library, Newcastle Discovery Museum, Cambridge Central Library, BFI National Library and BFI Southbank, London. Some key titles are also available on the BFI’s YouTube channel, www.YouTube.com/BFIFilms. Significant collections are also available to view by students and academics who can access moving image materials through the InView project and screenonline.

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Notes to editors

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the largest collection of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. With specialist storage facilities in Warwickshire and Hertfordshire the archive also boasts significant collections of stills, posters and designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera. We are funded partly by OfCom as the official archive for ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five. We record a representative sample of television across Britain's terrestrial channels and are the official archive of moving image records of Parliament.

BFI Mediatheques

Anyone can get access to collections of over 2200 titles from the archive for free at BFI Mediatheques around the UK, currently at BFI Southbank, BFI National Library, QUAD Derby, Central Library Cambridge, Wrexham Library, the Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

BFI National Archive Online

Our YouTube channel **BFI Films** has over 350 items which can be viewed online. Over 1.2 million views have now been recorded for *Royal Wedding* (1923) released in April overtaking *Alice in Wonderland* (1903) which has had just over 1.17 million views. Academic access for higher education is through the **BFI InView** project. Schools and educational institutions have access to a wide range of material at screenonline.org.uk. This is in addition to paid access at the BFI for other research needs.

BFI Special Collections

Part of the BFI National Archive, Special Collections looks after and makes available collections relating to individuals and organisations involved in the British film and television industries. Highlights of the collection include the papers of Sir David Lean, John Schlesinger, Derek Jarman, Joseph Losey, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, Carol Reed, Gerald Thomas, Lord Puttnam, Dirk Bogarde, Muriel, Sidney and Betty Box, the Children's Film Foundation and Hammer Films.

BFI Viewing Copies & BFI DVD

12,000 prints a year are loaned out by the BFI National Archive to support the programmes of 800 venues across the UK and overseas and our DVD label regularly issues selected items. These have included the hugely popular British Transport Films Collection series, the legendary documentaries of The GPO Film Unit and most recently an award-winning restoration of *The Great White Silence* (1922) the official film record of Scott's final expedition to the South Pole.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archival collections, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI National Archive

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On 1 April the BFI became the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive. We'll connect audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema; preserve and restore the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations; champion emerging and world class filmmakers in the UK; invest in creative, distinctive and entertaining work; promote British film and talent to the world; and grow the next generation of filmmakers and audiences.

For more information on the BFI and its work, visit bfi.org.uk

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