



6 March 2007

The Great British Film and Television Show: The BFI's Mediatheque programme goes on tour

In homage to the touring picture shows of the past, community groups, film societies, membership organisations and cinemas around the country can now access curated programmes offering titillating insights into Britain and Britons during the 20th century, drawn from the Mediatheque at the new BFI Southbank. The appetite for social-history on film has been demonstrated in recent years by the huge success of the BBC/BFI Mitchell and Kenyon and Friese-Greene collaborations. Now, for the first time ever, archive gems from the BFI National Archive can be accessed at the click of a button at the Mediatheque which launches in London on 14 March, and from April the BFI's Mediatheque Touring Programme takes this initiative nationwide.

The Mediatheque touring programme kicks off with **Bombs at Teatime**, a selection of delightful films that provide a fascinating glimpse into Britain during the 1940s that, among other things, show that whilst we may talk-the-talk about our carbon footprint in the 21st century, Britons were far more in touch with environmental issues sixty or more years ago.

In **Five-Inch Bather** (Richard Massingham, 1942, 2 mins) we're offered very topical advice on the importance of water economy and how five inches of water in the bathtub is enough for anyone to make a splash and get clean; in **The Good Housewife 'In Her Kitchen'** (1949, 9 mins) we're given some simple yet clever advice about keeping food fresh (and greens, green) with a marble slab and two terracotta pots. In a Ministry of Food film, **Two Cooks and a Kitchen** (Alex Bryce, 1941, 6 mins) Nigella is given a run for her money by a homely Grandmother teaching two young girls the do's and don'ts of cooking cabbage, while in **Tea Making Tips** (1941, 10 mins) we learn the six golden rules about how to make the perfect cuppa. Rather less appetising is **Unwanted Guests** (1943, 8 mins), which tells you everything you have ever wanted (or not) to know about headlice and perhaps discover where the obsession about ironing your underwear comes from...

World War II is the backdrop to **Christmas Under Fire** (Harry Watt, 1941, 10 mins) in which the (American) narrator uses some rather familiar sounding rhetoric 'the stormy waves of terrorism sweeping from Berlin'. Christmas 1940 was celebrated underground in Britain with tiny Christmas trees and no Church bells, but as our narrator tells us 'we shouldn't feel sorry for them because they don't feel sorry for themselves'. In **The Countrywomen** (John Page, 1941, 14 mins) we find out about the unsung contribution that the Women's Institute made to the War effort and their tireless campaigning to keep village-life alive with local shops, post-offices and bus services – all under threat today.

An unexpected snapshot of rural life at the end of the 1940s comes in **Springtime in an English Village** (Colonial Film Unit, 1948, 7 mins) with the crowning of a young black girl as Queen of the May. The credibility of this 'reality' is somewhat unclear, however: the film was made for the purpose of screening in towns and villages throughout Britain's African colonies, providing a rather less-than-accurate impression of the average English village. Little is known about the village (possibly in the Cotswolds), or the girl, but as the film tours, we are hoping viewers may be able to help solve the mystery and reunite the film with its star.

And finally, in **Island People** (Paul Rotha and Philip Leacock, 1940, 10 mins), made by the respected filmmaker Paul Rotha who celebrates his centenary this year, we get a guided tour of industrial and agricultural Britain in the 1940s which offers wonderful opportunity for comparison between then and now.

Bombs at Teatime is followed later in the year by a further two collections - a social history of food and feasting in Britain and a portrait of pre-independence India including previously unseen home movies.

For more information visit: www.bfi.org.uk/mediatheque or www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk

The tours and digitised material from the BFI National Archive has been generously supported by:



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For press information contact: Sarah Harvey, Sarah Harvey Publicity on 020 7703 2253 / 07958 597426 / press@sarahharvey.info

Notes to Editors:

1. Two versions of each programme are available: one feature length at approximately 80 mins and one at 40 minutes for community and local interest groups. Programme costs are £80 per booking for theatrical venues, £50 for film societies and non-theatrical venues and £20 for community groups. **For information about booking "Bombs at Teatime" contact:** Becky Clarke, Independent Cinema Office on 0207 636 712/ beckyc@independentcinemaoffice.org.uk

2. The BFI National Archive is the most significant and diverse film and television archive in the world. Increasing access to this extraordinary collection is at the heart of the Mediatheque. Visitors to BFI Southbank will be able to access hundreds of British films and television programmes for free, many unavailable elsewhere, at the click of a mouse.