

PRESS RELEASE

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LOVE LETTERS AND LIVE WIRES: GPO Film Unit 75th Anniversary - in cinemas across the UK

In September 2008 the BFI celebrates its 75th anniversary and coincidentally it is also 75 years since the General Post Office (GPO) founded the GPO Film Unit, responsible for one of the most distinctive and well-loved bodies of work in British film.

To mark this double anniversary, the **BFI** in partnership with **Royal Mail**, **The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA)** and **BT Heritage** will present a series of events and screenings at BFI Southbank in September followed by nationwide cinema screenings and the release of the first of three double-disc box sets containing all the key GPO Film Unit films on DVD for the first time. This project has entailed producing new prints of many titles by the **BFI National Archive** from its unparalleled collections, which was jointly funded by BFI and the BPMA. **BFI Screenonline**, **BT** and the **BPMA** will also present **Sir Derek Jacobi** in a unique archive interactive guide.

The release of the GPO Film Unit collection on DVD is an important moment in British and international film history. These legendary short films are impossible to categorise because of their great variety. They are a fascinating mixture of public information film, drama-documentary, social reportage, animation, advertising and many points in between.

Under **John Grierson** the GPO Film Unit was a hotbed of daring and innovative film-making. Ostensibly created to inform the nation of how to use the Post Office's services, the Unit included some of the greatest film-makers and artists of the day, from the likes of **Alberto Cavalcanti**, **Len Lye** and **Norman McLaren** to **W.H.Auden** and **Benjamin Britten**. Most of the great names of the British Documentary Movement were involved at some point including **Humphrey Jennings**, **Basil Wright**, **Harry Watt**, **Edgar Anstey** and **Arthur Elton**.

The GPO Film Unit is perhaps best known for its production of *Night Mail* (1936) one of the most enduring films of the British documentary movement. But there are many more lesser-known films which helped to extend the language of film. They are not only important documents of social history but also hugely entertaining.

Love Letters and Live Wires (1936-1939) is a selection of the best of the GPO Film Unit screening in cinemas nationwide. While dispensing clear and entertaining instructions on the use of such new-fangled devices as the post code, the telephone or the air mail service, these films brilliantly promote the GPO's contribution to workplace efficiency, world trade and smoothing the path of true love. Whether using avant-garde animation in *Trade Tattoo* (1937), or exploring the realities of delivering the post in the flooded Norfolk village of Horsey in *The Horsey Mail* (1938), the films offer a delightful insight into British life in the 1930s. *The Fairy of the Phone* (1936) is a musical designed to educate the public in how to use the telephone as it truly became a mass communication device.

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Thursday 18 September – Tuesday 30 September:

The project will launch during the BFI's anniversary celebrations at BFI Southbank in September with the first screening of **Love Letters and Live Wires** on 18 September followed by a discussion with leading figures exploring the GPO's living legacy in documentary, advertising and the modern world. Repeat screenings daily 19 – 30 September.

An additional programme of GPO Rarities will screen on **Tue 30 September**.

Sunday 21 September, or different date marked*

Love Letters and Live Wires plays at the following cinemas:

Aberdeen, Belmont Picturehouse; **Bath**, Little Cinema; **Bristol**, Watershed; **Cambridge**, Picturehouse; **Chichester**, New Park*; **Darlington**, The Barn*; **Derby**, Quad*; **Edinburgh**, Cameo; **Exeter**, Picturehouse; **Glasgow**, Film Theatre*; **Inverness**, Eden Court*; **Lancaster**, The Dukes*; **Leeds**, Hyde Park Picturehouse; **Leicester**, Phoenix Arts*; **Liverpool**, FACT Picturehouse; **London**, Clapham Picturehouse, Gate, Greenwich Picturehouse, Renoir*, Rio*, Ritzy, Screen on Baker St, Screen on the Hill, Screen on the Green; **Manchester**, Cornerhouse; **Newbury**, Corn Exchange; **Newcastle**, Tyneside Cinema; **Norwich**, Cinema City; **Nottingham**, Broadway; **Oxford**, Phoenix Picturehouse; **Sheffield**, Showroom Cinema; **Southampton**, Picturehouse; **Stirling**, MacRoberts Arts Centre*; **Tewkesbury**, Roses Theatre*; **Wolverhampton**, Light House*; **York**, City Screen Picturehouse

Monday 22 September:

The GPO Film Unit Collection Volume One released

Addressing the Nation (1933–1935) double-disc DVD box set

Volume one contains 15 films from 1933-1935 and provides a fascinating exploration of the unit's early experimentation with sound. Features the award-winning *Song of Ceylon* and *A Colour Box*, the critically acclaimed *Weather Forecast*, *Coal Face* – Auden and Britten's precursor to *Night Mail* and other neglected works many of which will be available for the first time since their original release.

We Live in Two Worlds - Volume Two: released **9 February 2009**

If War Should Come - Volume Three: released **Spring 2009**

Notes to editors:

1. The BFI celebrates its 75th birthday with special events, screenings and film seasons. www.bfi.org.uk/75

2. **BFI Screenonline, BT and the BPMA** present
An Archive Interactive with Sir Derek Jacobi.

Log on to [www.http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tours/jacobi](http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tours/jacobi) for an illustrated guide by this distinguished actor, who delves into the GPO Film Unit's rich history, with a wide range of well-chosen clips

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- The British Postal Museum and Archive cares for the visual, physical and written records of over 400 years of postal development including stamps, poster design, photography, staff records and vehicles. For more information visit www.postalheritage.org.uk
- BT's commitment to its heritage is published in its Heritage Policy (www.bt.com/archives) adopted in 2004. BT is the only major company to have made such a public commitment to safeguarding its past and future heritage. The key features of our approach are to maintain historical documents and records within the company, under the management of BT Archives, and to promote access to our physical artefacts online and at museums across the UK through BT's Connected Earth initiative (www.connected-earth.com).
- 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



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