



PRESS RELEASE

09/38

THE BIG SMOKE: Films from a Lost London 1896 – 1945

The Big Smoke is a BFI touring programme which allows Londoners and non-Londoners alike a chance to see rare footage of the city in history. From Victorian streets crowded with hackney-cabs to the excitement of VE Day, from underground stations to a Thames crowded with steam-boats these films reveal both the continuities of London life and the London that has disappeared. For some these films will re-ignite distant memories but for most people the films offer the unique pleasure of discovering the surprising London of previous generations.

The Big Smoke is part of **The Story of London** project organised by the Mayor of London's office. This programme is available for bookings to venues around the UK through the Independent Cinema Office and is a collaboration between the BFI National Archive, London's Screen Archives, Imperial War Museum and Ronnie Scott's with the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will launch at BFI Southbank on Saturday 13th June, with a sneak preview during Late at Tate Britain on Friday 5th June.

Highlights include a glimpse of the ethnically rich populations of Limehouse in 1924 in *Cosmopolitan London* and Claude Friese-Greene's patent colour process showing London in the vibrant hues of 1926, while street scenes from Victorian and Edwardian London include Blackfriars Bridge, Petticoat Lane and the West End around Trafalgar Square. No one who has ever visited London can remain indifferent to the thrill of seeing how Londoners moved around its streets so many years ago. All of the footage in this programme is silent and is accompanied by a vibrant, specially-commissioned score composed and performed by celebrated pianist James Pearson with the Ronnie Scott's All Stars.

Much of the material in this programme is derived from the BFI Mediatheque collection available to view at BFI Southbank and QUAD, Derby. A further Mediatheque will open at Cambridge Central Library later in the year. Each Mediatheque has over 1,400 complete films and television programmes exploring Britain's rich heritage on screen, all available to view free of charge.

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Notes to Editors

1. For more information on the BFI, including details of the BFI's theatrical touring programmes, DVDs and books, visit www.bfi.org.uk

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

2. The BFI National Archive is the world's most significant archive of film and television. It contains more than 230,000 films (features, shorts and documentaries) and more than 675,000 television programmes. The collection also contains internationally renowned holdings of posters, stills and designs along with the papers of major directors.

The collection is made available through public screenings at festivals and cinemas throughout the UK including regular screenings at BFI Southbank, alongside video and DVD releases, and online through the BFI's Screenonline website.

3. **Tour venues confirmed so far (see www.independentcinemaorganisation.co.uk/mediatheque for updates)**

Millbank | [Tate Britain](#)

- Friday, 5 June 2009

Brixton | [Ritzy Cinema](#)

- Friday, 12 - Thursday, 18 June 2009

Southbank | [BFI Southbank](#) with live musical accompaniment

- Saturday, 13 June 2009

Sutton | [London Borough of Sutton Archives](#)

- Sunday, 14 June 2009

Stratford | [Stratford East Picturehouse](#)

- Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Hackney | [Friends of Clapton Cinematograph Theatre](#)

- Sunday, 14 June 2009

Kensal Rise | [The Lexi Cinema](#)

- Friday, 19 June 2009

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Clapham Picturehouse | [Clapham Picturehouse](#)

- Tuesday, 23 June 2009

East Finchley | [Phoenix Cinema](#)

- Tuesday, 23 June 2009

Greenwich | [Greenwich Picturehouse](#)

- Tuesday, 23 & Wednesday, 24 June 2009

Croydon | [David Lean Cinema](#)

- Wednesday, 24 & Thursday, 25 June 2009

Covent Garden | [Covent Garden Hotel](#)

- Saturday, 27 June 2009

Lewisham | [Rivoli Ballroom](#)

- Thursday, 2 July 2009

Dalston | [Rio Cinema](#)

- Saturday, 5 July 2009

4. Complete screening programme:

Blackfriars Bridge

Dir: R W Paul, 1896, 1min

Shot by British film pioneer RW Paul, this early record of Victorian commuters was first screened at London's Alhambra Theatre

Petticoat Lane

1903, 2 mins

In operation since the 1750s, this famous market is in full swing here. The absence of women and the uniformity of Edwardian clothing are striking.

Old London Street Scenes

1903, 4 mins

Hyde Park Corner, Parliament Square and Charing Cross Station aren't the only recognisable sights. Look out for the advertising on buses amid the familiar chaos of rush hour.

City of Westminster

1909, 3 mins

A 'phantom ride' sequence shot from a moving vehicle puts us right in the thick of the traffic as we sail through Trafalgar Square, ending up at the Old Curiosity Shop.

The Smallest Car in the Largest City in the World (extract)

1913, 4 mins

When Queen Alexandra ordered a miniature car for Crown Prince Olav of Norway, the manufacturer Cadillac couldn't resist taking it for a spin around central London.

Hoxton... Saturday July 3rd, Britannia Theatre (extract)

1920, 1 min

A busy Saturday on Old Street near the famous East End music hall, long before Shoreditch was colonised by the fashionable set.

London Street Scenes c.1920s (extract)

c.1920s, 3 mins

Modes of transport had evolved since the turn of the century but the pedestrians were as plucky as ever! Watch out for some artistic touches from the filmmaker and a serenely crowd-free Regent Street. Spot the changes and continuities throughout half a century of life in The Big Smoke with a tantalizing journey into London's not-so-distant past.

The Fugitive Futurist: A Quiriosity by "Q"

Dir: Gaston Quiribet, 1924, 11mins

Sci-fi, 1920s style: a magic camera that can 'see beyond the limits of ordinary life' offers futuristic visions of London landmarks. Airships hover above the Houses of Parliament and Tower Bridge hosts a sky-high monorail, while Trafalgar Square appears flooded by the sea: perhaps our inventor isn't so mad after all...

Cosmopolitan London (extract)

1924, 2 mins

A rare glimpse of London's increasingly diverse population during a visit to the district of Limehouse, then home to Chinese, Asian and African workers from the Port of London.

The Port of London (extract)

1924, 11 mins

Courtesy of the Port of London Authority Collection/

Museum of London, Docklands

Featuring extraordinary aerial footage, this film documents a time when the Thames was still very much a working river.

London's Contrasts (extract)

1924, 3 mins

Hop onto the capital's last horse-drawn bus, taking in the busy Caledonian Market and a fishing village nestling under Hammersmith Bridge.

The Open Road (extract)

Dir: Claude Friese-Greene, 1926, 3 mins

London was the final stop in maverick filmmaker Claude Friese-Greene's marathon journey around Britain, his picture-postcard scenes brought to life with a specially devised colour film process.

Wedding at Belmont Free Church (extract)

1931, 2 mins

Courtesy of Sutton Archives

In the South London borough of Sutton, local girl Miss Sylvia Willie celebrates her wedding to Mr. Allen Trussler, much to the neighbours' curiosity.

Scenes at Piccadilly Circus and Hyde Park Corner Underground Stations (extract)

c.1931, 3 mins

With thanks to the London Transport Museum

The underground infrastructure in this strangely poetic film will look familiar to modern Londoners, but the faces and fashions are very different.

Some Activities of the Bermondsey Borough Council (extract)

1931, 4 mins

With thanks to Southwark Local History Library Bermondsey's Labour-run council commissioned a series of films documenting improvements to this once impoverished borough.

Views from Hackney Library Roof (extracts)

c.1930s, 2 mins

Courtesy of Hackney Archives

These gloriously colourful scenes evoke peaceful leisure time in a borough that has more recently become a focus of the city's cultural life.

Lunch-Hour (extract)

Dir: Matthew Nathan, 1933, 4 mins,

With thanks to Mrs G. Nathan

The City of London bursts into life at lunchtime, with the top hats, bowlers, homburgs, trilbies and caps signifying the Square Mile's intriguing social structure.

Colour on the Thames (extract)

Dir: Adrian Klein, 1935, 2 mins

A rare and magical portrait of the Thames in the 1930s: filmed using the early Gasparcolor system, it harks back to an age of steam-powered river commerce.

Britain at War: The London Blitz (extracts)

Dir: Rosie Newman, 1941, 4 mins

Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

For Londoners the early 1940s was the most terrifying period in living memory. Wealthy socialite Rosie Newman gained unprecedented access and permission to film during the Blitz resulting in a haunting colour record of its devastation.

Amateur Film by Lieutenant Sidney Sasson (extracts)

1945, 4 mins

Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum

Some of the most evocative footage of the VE and VJ Day celebrations was shot by US serviceman Sidney Sasson, marking a joyous end to years of war – and the dawn of a new era for London.