



BFI National Library celebrates turning 75

The BFI National Library's outstanding collections are celebrated this month as the UK's biggest film and television research resource marks its 75th anniversary on 7 July.

The BFI National Library offers access to the largest collection of material about the moving image in the world, including: scripts, contracts, letters, diaries and working papers of film-makers, writers and producers; major television archives; 60,000 books; 6,000 journals; over two million newspaper cuttings; festival catalogues (dating back to the 1934 Venice Film Festival); and a growing collection of audio material.

Beginning life as the Information Service for the newly established BFI, the department was, by 1934, the most active section of the young institute. Initially set up 'to provide information on every aspect of cinematography' to BFI members, and more generally to teachers, students, film societies and all film enthusiasts, the service was expanded by Ernest Lindgren (the future curator of the National Film Archive) to form a book and periodical library*.

Today, the Library collections – which are increasingly available online – include the widest possible coverage of all areas of the BFI's remit, with biographical and critical works on film and TV from Pedro Almodóvar to Robert Zemeckis, from *Big Brother* to *Z-Cars*; reviews and critical studies on films from *A bout de souffle* to *Zulu*; periodical titles from *ABC Film Review* to *Zoom!*, including runs of early trade and fan magazines dating back to the first decade of the 20th century; and academic journals from all over the world.

There are sound recordings of interviews with film-makers as diverse as Chuck Jones, Alfred Hitchcock and Akira Kurosawa; film festival catalogues dating back to the 1930s; extensive documentation of television from its earliest days, particularly from the UK and the USA; over 30,000 unpublished scripts; and the largest collection of film press and campaign books – totalling more than 30,000 – outside North America.

The oldest book in the collection dates back to the 17th Century; *Ars magna lucis et umbrae. Pars tertia* by Athanasius Kircher was published by Liber decimus in Rome in 1646 and is a study of the nature of light and image, looking at camera obscura and how to produce it. Not surprisingly, it is also the most valuable (at roughly £7,000). However, there are items in Special Collections that are priceless: letters written by Dirk Bogarde, Charlie Chaplin, Julie Christie, Sergei Eisenstein and Alec Guinness, and unique handwritten scripts and treatments for films such *Chariots of Fire*, *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Distant Voices, Still Lives*.

People contact and visit the Library from all over the world for the unrivalled depth of its holdings; you can go online to Amazon and buy the latest book, but you cannot get *Picturegoer* or *Kine Weekly* from 1920 or access a database with references from it. If you want to see how a film was received critically in the UK since 1945, for example, the exhaustive newspaper cuttings are a fantastic primary resource for the film historian or casual researcher.

Increasing digitisation is not only offering greater access to Library resources for more people, but also provides valuable opportunities to capitalise on those assets with partner organisations. In 2007, the Library sublicensed the BFI's entire Film and TV Database, containing hugely rich and detailed credit information, to the American company Gracenote. When a film or TV programme is

downloaded on to a mobile device such as an iPhone or iPod, the accompanying credit and filmographic information is sourced from BFI data via Gracenote. BFI data is also used by leading information resources and technology website Proquest which publishes Film Index International on the BFI's behalf. So far this year, more than 26,000 access sessions (mainly university library subscribers) have been logged for the BFI on this site.

David Sharp, Head Librarian, says: 'It is important that we keep moving with the times, which means continually developing distributed digital delivery of our collections.

'Our ambition is to continue to open up access to our collections for all our users and to broaden our user base to encompass everyone from school students and upwards, to more casual and life-long learners. The Library already offers popular tours and induction sessions for visiting groups of GCSE and A level students of media studies who have a research element built in to their course. This benefits the students, who we hope will become users of the future.

'We also need to keep on acquiring. If we do not, the collection will become frozen in time, still valuable but increasingly fossilised – and while fossils can speak of a dead past, at 75, we are very much alive!'

The Library currently receives around 13,500 visits a year and handles 25,000 information enquiries (telephone, written and email). Every month, the Library section of the BFI website receives an average of 33,184 visits, of which 21,970 are unique visitors.

Major features on the BFI website highlight rare and unique materials from the Special Collections, along with sites dedicated to great British talent such as David Lean and Charlie Chaplin. Some of these collections have yet to be fully explored to yield the treasures they undoubtedly hold. Only recently, previously unknown WH Auden manuscript material was discovered by a researcher investigating papers in the Ivor Montagu collection (Montagu was a dedicated Communist who ran the (London) Film Society). The Auden material then formed the basis of a special BFI screening and talk of the film it related to – *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) directed by Dziga Vertov.

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***Further facts about the BFI National Library**

During the Second World War the library was transported, by Government order, out of central London and into the countryside. It spent the rest of the war in a disused stable in Rudgwick, Suffolk. The Library, together with the BFI, has moved several times before.

- 1948 – the BFI had new headquarters in Shaftesbury Avenue.
- 1960 – the BFI moved to Dean Street
- 1977 – the BFI moved to new premises in Charing Cross Road
- 1987 – the BFI moved to its current premises in Stephen Street, London W1.

From *Magic Lanterns* to *Screen International*, the oldest moving image journal goes back to before cinema officially begins in 1896. The *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* began in June 1889, eventually becoming the long running *Kine Weekly*. Like other British institutions there is a certain dynastic element to it as its descendant is *Screen International*.

There are fantastic materials to be found in our 600 Special Collections, ranging from Derek Jarman's papers to those of the long defunct Southern Television. Recently, the Joseph Losey collection was used to underpin a two-month retrospective of the director at BFI Southbank, as well as to create its accompanying Pinter-Losey exhibition.

The most significant developments in recent years have been in relation to providing information electronically. The Library catalogue can now be searched online, supported by a wide range of annotated study guides. Standard enquiries are handled by a comprehensive set of Frequently Asked Questions and a substantial set of film and TV links, and there is a busy email enquiry service.

A major current project is digitising the back runs of the former *Monthly Film Bulletin* and the BFI's *Sight & Sound* magazine to provide authoritative information for film researchers as a key part of the Library portfolio.

The BFI National Library holds:

- 60,000 books
- 6,000 periodical titles, many in extensive runs, dating back as far as the end of the 19th century
- over two million press cuttings (on microfiche)
- extensive collections of publicity and press releases
- a vast collection of film and TV festival catalogues covering festivals all over the world
- sound recordings (including unique copies of the interviews and lectures delivered at the BFI National Film Theatre over a period of around 40 years)
- 30,000 scripts (screenplays and teleplays)
- 30,000 press and campaign books
- special collections, including personal and company papers, ephemera, programmes etc
- multimedia resources

- a massive database of information on film and television production, which also acts as an index to the Library's periodicals collection.

Free wi-fi and internet access is available in the Library and staff have bookmarked key data sources such as Film Index International, Film Literature Index and the American Film Institute catalogue to enhance the range of research material available. Gradually, the filmographic records will lead, via their attached journal references, to full-text articles online.

The Library has for some time operated a Research Viewings service, and this year set up two BFI Mediatheque terminals for users to view a curated range of material from the BFI National Archive collections. There is also access to the BFI's education website Screenonline which contains 3,500 titles, 600 hours of moving image material, and around 1.5 million words of expert analysis and context – all providing an outstanding encyclopaedic overview of British film and television history.

Current users

Around three quarters of Reading Room visitors are in education, with the remainder consisting of researchers (including journalists, writers, film and TV programme makers) and film and TV fans.

The Library:

- has around 13,500 visits a year
- processes 25,000 information enquiries (telephone, written and email)
- receives a monthly average of 33,184 online visitors to its pages on the BFI website (including film and TV information), of which 21,970 are unique visitors.

The Library is also an essential research and information resource for the BFI itself, and delivers a wide range of internal services. In 2008-2009, the Library's Filmographic Unit produced 1,154 sets of audience programme notes to accompany screenings at BFI Southbank.

Who's the most popular film-maker?

In terms of books amassed by the Library, Alfred Hitchcock is the most written about film-maker with over 230 books about him. He even has an annual dedicated to him – *The Hitchcock Annual* is overseen by Hitchcock scholar Sidney Gottlieb. Previously, the other most written-about film-maker was another Londoner who went to Hollywood and did well – Charles Chaplin (with 200+ books).

Famous users

Some of the people who, over the years, have been annual or day members of the BFI Library:

Alun Armstrong	Hal Hartley
Richard Ayoade	Paolo Hewitt
Bernard Bresslaw	Demetri Jagger
Michael Caine (Sir Michael's day pass from the 1960s is in the Special Collections)	Mark Kermode
Simon Callow	Denis Lawson
Angela Carter	Patricia Losey
Anna Chancellor	Kevin MacDonald
Navin Chowdhry	David McAlmont
Michael Cimino	Jonathan Romney
Mark Cousins	Thelma Schoonmaker
Sir Christopher Frayling	Matthew Sweet
Dennis Gifford	Alexander Walker
Peter Hain	Ruth Wilson

Notes to Editors

For more information on the BFI 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.

Visit the BFI National Library at 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN or use its online resources for all information on film, television and, increasingly, new media. The priority of the Library is to provide comprehensive coverage of the moving image in Britain from pre-cinema to the present, but the scope of its collection is international. The Library includes books, periodicals, audio tapes, press cuttings, festival materials, special collections of unpublished materials, and much more.