

TAKING THE PULSE OF THE NATION BFI CELEBRATES 70 YEARS OF THE NHS ON FILM



Life in Her Hands (1951), AIDS – Iceberg (1987)

The fundamental role of film in promoting the formation of the NHS, 70 years on

The impact of film on the nation's health, changing attitudes through high profile public health campaigns

Film as a major recruitment and training aid

Central Office of Information (COI) role as commissioner and producer in the story of the NHS on film

****NHS ON FILM available via BFI Player <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/collection/nhs-on-film> from 26 June****

facebook.com/BritishFilmInstitute | twitter.com/bfi

Release embargoed until: 5 June 2018, London

Marking the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the UK's National Health Service (5 July 1948), the **BFI** launches **NHS ON FILM**. A central contribution to **NHS70**, a nationwide celebration, this unique online collection of rare films drawn from the **BFI National Archive** and **The National Archives** digs deep into the richly fascinating story of our NHS on screen, in film and television.

Ever since 1948 filmmakers have aided the cause of national health through documentary, drama and animation. Highlighting the place of film as both a record of the story of the NHS and as a player in that story, this new collection charts the evolution of healthcare as reflected through the moving image, revealing changes in filming techniques and in society itself as well as behind the scenes access. With **70 films marking 70 years** of the NHS publicly available for the first time, **NHS ON FILM is free to view on BFI Player on 26 June**.

NHS ON FILM launches at **BFI Southbank** on 26 June with a **special screening on 26 June, 18:30, NFT1 followed by a panel discussion with filmmakers, NHS commissioners and historians** to explore how film has helped shape the health of a nation. Chaired by Patrick Russell (Senior Curator, non-fiction, BFI National Archive) the panel includes Alexia Clifford (Public Health England), Chris Godwin (Inner Eye Productions), Jane Hand (University of Warwick), Dame Eileen Sills (Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust) and Pete Stevenson (The Edge Picture Company).

Film has played an important, historically undervalued role in the running of the NHS, with direct benefits to the health and well-being of the public. From major public campaigns which have imprinted themselves on the public consciousness on screen in cinemas, television and now through social media including pioneering anti-smoking films such as *Smoking and You* (1963) and *The Smoking Machine* (1964), Glenda Jackson and Ernie Wise's wisecracking charity appeal for The National Blood Service, *Blood Donor: Glenda and Ernie* (1981) to the iconic, hard-hitting 1980s *AIDS Don't Die of Ignorance* awareness campaign voiced by John Hurt, films have had a real life impact on the health of the nation, literally helping to save lives.

The **BFI preserves the entire Central Office of Information (COI) collection** on behalf of **The National Archives**. This collection includes most films made for the NHS in the 20th century, with a selection made accessible as part of **NHS ON FILM**. As the official archive for the UK Government, The National Archives holds the definitive paper record of the establishment of the NHS and also holds documentation related to the making of the films in the COI collection. Through these records, the BFI and The National Archives are able to tell the full story of the COI in commissioning and producing films for the NHS through supporting marketing materials and visual aids including posters and leaflets, annotated commentaries, scripts and production information.

The 1948 foundation of the NHS was the first time that the government had been faced with the prospect of having to inform the public about a revolutionary service on such a monumental scale. Film played a fundamental role as a key means of promoting and explaining the new NHS to the British public, in a raft of COI productions spanning documentary, drama and animation; *Doctor's Dilemma* (1948), *Here's Health* (1948) and *For Your Very Good Health* (1948).

Throughout the post-war period film was used as a major recruiting aid for the NHS. As part of a wider national recruitment campaign to address the chronic shortage of qualified nurses in Britain, this included a publicly funded docu-drama feature film, *Life in Her Hands* (1951), starring Kathleen Byron of *Black Narcissus* fame as a young widow considering nursing as a career. **NHS ON FILM** includes a number of fascinating recruitment films as well as training initiatives for nurses and doctors at the cutting edge of health policy, many of which were never designed to be viewed by the general public or indeed patients, such as pioneering director Margaret Thomson's treatment of mental illness in *Understanding Aggression* (1955).

Film today is being used more widely and imaginatively than ever before, in the last 2-3 years with the growth of digital technology there has been a resurgence in filmmaking within the NHS, with films commissioned through Public Health England and individual NHS Trusts.

From multimillion campaigns commissioned by **Public Health England** including the award-winning healthy eating campaign, *Change4life*, to remarkable behind-the-scenes films like *Seen and Heard* (2016) used by the **Department of Health** to transform the health profession's understanding of child sexual abuse, and the *Barbara's Story* series of films (2012-13) commissioned by **Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust** to improve compassionate care with regard to the treatment of the elderly and dementia, film is the perfect medium for breaking down boundaries in approaches to modern healthcare, tackling challenging subjects and helping bring about active change across an entire culture.

In addition to the 26 June launch event **BFI Southbank** will also screen a **double bill screening of *Life in Her Hands* (1951) and *On Call to a Nation* (1958) on 30 June, 13:30, NFT2.**

A curated playlist of related film and television titles from the BFI's national collections will also be available to browse at the **BFI Mediatheque**, in venue at BFI Southbank.

[NHS ON FILM collection highlights include:](#)

*A Modern Guide to Health** (1946) – Modern advice and old-fashioned values prevail in Halas & Batchelor's animated pre-NHS health guide, explaining the value of correct posture, fresh air, exercise and suitable clothing.

*Doctor's Dilemma** (1948) - Distributed in conjunction with a larger media campaign with a remit to instruct the public on what they needed to do in order to benefit from the new scheme, this film was shown widely in cinemas across the country.

*Here's Health** (1948) – This COI/Ministry of Health drama uses a family and community story to mark the nationalisation of the health service, revolving around a hard-working local doctor, imagining the then near-future in which resources will be better planned and used for the benefit of the nation's health.

*Your Very Good Health** (1948) – Halas & Batchelor's beautiful choreographed slapstick animation injects a freshness and immediacy into this entertaining post war propaganda. Endowed with an average man-on-the-

street's everyday charm the central character, Charley (1946-1948), was a popular and familiar face to disseminate important information to the masses.

His Fighting Chance* (1949) – Narrated by Eleanor Roosevelt and Michael Redgrave this public campaign film for infantile paralysis/Polio presents the facts plainly, giving a general account of the disease, the number of cases, how it affects its victims both children and adults alike, as well as focusing on modern techniques of rehabilitation.

Life in Her Hands* (1951) - Featuring a strong script by Monica Dickens (great grand-daughter of Charles) and Anthony Steven which appeals to and targeted women, *Life in Her Hands* follows the life and training of a nurse, seen through the eyes of a young widow played by Kathleen Byron (*Black Narcissus*). Part of a wider national recruitment campaign to address the chronic shortage of qualified nurses in post-war Britain and encourage women into the profession.

Understanding Aggression* (1960) - Directed by veteran documentarist Margaret Thomson (*The Troubled Mind* (1954), *Continuous Observation* (1955)) this drama-documentary explores the ways in which staff should deal with aggressive episodes by psychiatric patients. Primarily produced as a teaching aide for student nurses, to help them prepare for and understand their role it would have been restricted to professional audiences.

Modern Day Nightingales (1978) - Presented by actress Jumoke Debayo, this episode of COI magazine series London Line describes aspects of modern nursing, focusing on intensive care treatment at Guy's Hospital in an age of advanced medical technology. Britain's nursing profession attracted many African students and the series, particularly in the early 1970s, had regular stories following African students at university or those involved in social work or healthcare.

The Smoking Machine* (1964) - Intended primarily for children aged 9-12. Presented in the context of a major nationwide anti-smoking campaign, suggesting that it's not grown-up to smoke. Five children, their curiosity provoked by their friend, Jim, a teenage cigarette chain-smoker, set out to discover why people smoke.

Blood Donor: Glenda and Ernie (1981) - Glenda Jackson makes a song and a dance about giving blood in a wise-cracking double act with Ernie Wise. The tradition of using well-known film and TV personalities in health campaigns goes back to the earliest days of the public information film. The National Blood Service struck gold with this entertaining appeal film, pairing the queen of costume drama and acknowledged king of comedy.

AIDS – Monolith (1985) and ***Iceberg**** (1987) - The result of a £5 million campaign masterminded by advertising rising star Sammy Harari to combat the growing AIDs epidemic. This hard-hitting and memorable campaign undoubtedly fulfilled its brief of pervading public consciousness, simple and iconic imagery combined with John Hurt's grave voiceover defined these highly charged public health films, bringing public information filmmaking into the realm of state-of-the-art corporate advertising.

- END -

BFI Press contacts for information on the NHS ON FILM online collection and BFI Southbank event:
Sarah Bemand, Press Officer, Archive & Heritage, Tel +44(0) 207 957 8940 sarah.bemand@bfi.org.uk
Elizabeth Dunk, Junior Press Officer, Tel +44 (0) 207 957 8986 elizabeth.dunk@bfi.org.uk

The National Archives press contact for COI documentation and images:
Frances Haycock, The National Archives Media team, Tel +44(0)208 392 5277 press@nationalarchives.gov.uk

NOTES TO EDITORS

A number of films in the BFI curated NHS ON FILM collection (as * above) are UK government public information films from The National Archives collection, preserved and digitized by the BFI National Archive.

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

- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

ABOUT THE BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage.

That heritage includes all time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean and Powell and Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant collection of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.

ABOUT BFI PLAYER

BFI Player is a ground-breaking video on demand service which offers a uniquely diverse range of films, from the latest releases to the rarest silent cinema classics, giving UK audiences a rich and rewarding digital film experience. The Britain on Film collections are accessible through the BFI Player. <http://player.bfi.org.uk>

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

[The National Archives](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/) is one of the world's most valuable resources for research and an independent research organisation in its own right. As the official archive and publisher for the UK government, and England and Wales they are the guardians of some of the UK's most iconic national documents dating back more than 1,000 years, including Domesday Book, Shakespeare's Will and top secret MI5 files. Their role is to collect and secure the future of the government record, both digital and physical, to preserve it for generations to come, and to make it as accessible and available as possible. The National Archives brings together the skills and specialisms needed to conserve some of the oldest historic documents as well as leading digital archive practices to manage and preserve government information past, present and future. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>