Theory and Practice of Screen Advertising

The BFI National Archive is home to one of the world’s largest screen advertising collections with over 100,000 cinema and television adverts ranging from the iconic and most recognisable brands including Guinness, Cadbury’s, Shell, Heinz, Persil, Kellogg’s and Coca-Cola to the obscure (Andrews Liver Salts or CDF Dogfood anyone?) Working with regional and national archive partners across the UK, the BFI has digitised 300 archive adverts all available for free on BFI Player. With the earliest advert on film dating from 1898 (Vinolia Soap) to the late 1980s, Commercial Break: British Advertising on Screen traces the history, overarching themes and development of the art of British screen advertising from its earliest days, finding maturity with the rise of the cinema in the 1930s and going on to transform the commercial television viewing experience with the launch of ITV in 1955 and subsequent growth of television.

Providing snapshots of what we ate, how we travelled and the lives we all aspired to, this collection includes classic campaigns from the golden age of advertising in the 1970s and 1980s from the likes of Collett Dickenson Pearce (CDP) and J. Walter Thompson, featuring early work by Sir Ridley Scott The Boy on the Bike (1973), Hugh Hudson (Fiat Strada: Figaro, 1979) and Tony Scott (SAAB: New Delivery, 1985) which helped launch their Hollywood careers. The collection also showcases unexpected delights from established directors including Nicolas Roeg Guinness: Hop Farm (1974), Lindsay Anderson Black Magic: Taxi (1964), Joseph Losey Silvikrin Shampoo (1964) and theatre legend Joan Littlewood Egg Marketing Board: Sheila – series (1964), long after they ‘made it’.

Famous faces onscreen include Tony Hancock, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, Sheila Sim, John Cleese, Ronnie Barker, Beryl Reid, Sammy Davis Jr, Googie Withers, Geoff Hurst, George Best and Margaret Lockwood as well as ‘before they were famous’ appearances by Anna Karina, Michael Caine and Terry Thomas.

The female consumer has long been a target of screen advertising, selling everything from baked beans and washing powders to labour-saving devices to help lighten the domestic load. Interestingly, in a male dominated advertising industry, this collections tells (and sells) a more positive story of social progress for women, with increasing social and economic independence, tracking the ups and downs of female empowerment in the 20th century, with its false steps as revealing as its forward ones.

BFI National Archive Curator Steve Foxon says, “There’s an art to selling, as any ad man or woman will tell you. Britain’s screen advertising has been a central part of the British film story since its earliest days, It found its feet in the cinema, transformed television and its ripples have even influenced Hollywood”
Adding, “A perfect blend of nostalgia, salesmanship and craftsmanship, screen advertising at its best is incredibly potent, affecting our emotions as well as holding a mirror up to reflect society’s changing aspirations, values, fears and desires. Few films can capture all this in such a compact and expressive format.”

Commercial Break: British Advertising on Screen highlights the evolution of the UK’s extraordinarily dynamic industry across the twentieth century, showcasing the astonishing variety of approaches, strategies and tricks advertisers have used over the decades for us to part with our money, entertaining us even as they subtly manipulate us with promises of a new, tastier, brighter, cleaner, healthier and better lifestyle.

In addition to the BFI Player collection, the BFI National Archive has lovingly remastered 24 iconic film adverts made by some of the most illustrious names in British cinema. Described by BFI Head Curator Robin Baker as “mini masterpieces of big nostalgic emotion” these fondly remembered titles have been restored in 4K and will be made available to view at BFI Mediatheque from July, as part of a tie-in advertising collection, to view in venue at BFI Southbank.

EARLY PIONEERS OF SCREEN ADVERTISING

Even before there were cinemas, screen advertising was a key part of the film going experience. With these earliest steps into screen advertising companies exploited the medium of moving pictures and learnt to mimic nascent film form in comedy, drama, documentary and even animation to feature their products centre-stage.

Notable examples include:

- **Rudge-Whitworth: Britain’s Best Bicycle (1901)** A prototypical 30 second ad format and simple, effective message, sell us “Britain’s Best Bicycle”
- **Dewar’s: The Spirit of his Forefathers (1900) (reissued as The Whiskey of His Ancestors in 1977)** Decades before Harry Potter’s Hogwarts Gallery, a Laird’s ancestral portraits come to life to share a wee dram with their modern descendent.
- **The Tale of the Amp Lion (1925).** Cartoonist, illustrator and artist William Heath Robinson animates a gramophone speaker in what is believed to be his only foray into animation.
- **Changing Hues (1922)**, Channelling *Pretty in Pink* innovative early film colour techniques bring ‘Twink’ clothes dyes to the big screen in this transformative love story.

CINEMA ADVERTISING FINDS ITS VOICE

The 1930s saw screen advertising find its voice at the cinema. This wasn't just down to the arrival of the 'talkies', but to the increasing professionalism of ad agencies and production companies involved. Through WWII and post-war austerity into the early 1950s, cinema advertising offered brands an opportunity to reach a captive audience. Adverts increasingly played on cinematic tropes to sell their products as big screen entertainment.

- **Gibbs SR: The Warning (1941)** Playing on film noir conventions this hugely elaborate mock-trailer for a thriller that never existed includes knife throwing, glamour, gangsters and sound dental advice.
- **Co-operette (1938)** Inspired by the bold and elegant big screen musicals of the period, dancing vegetables ‘cut a rug’ in this distinctively colourful mini-musical for the Co-op.
- **Rinso: Little Miss Muddlehead (1943)** Wartime patriotism is awash in this outlandish live-action cartoon. Miss Muddlehead is encouraged by a talking Rinso washing powder box to do her bit for the war effort to conserve fuel and defeat Hitler.

THE BIRTH OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

The launch of ITV on 22 September 1955 brought advertising to the small screen. Commercial television spread rapidly across the UK, inviting the salesperson directly into the living room of every home, and bringing with it a more intimate approach to screen advertising.

This collection shows how some advertisers struggled to find the right voice and formats for the new medium, while others hit the ground running. A staple of commercial television in the early years the short-lived but
extremely popular ‘Admag’ magazine format combined guest appearances and product promotion with practical household advice, ‘Admags’ were eventually banned after a report by the Pilkington Committee published in June 1962 stated that they blurred the distinction between programmes and adverts.

- **FCB TV show No:1 (1955) and T.V. Talk – Lintas (1954)** Ad agencies Foote Cone and Belding and Lintas came up example television schedules to persuade their clients what television screen advertising could look like, even going as far as making fake ads and programming.
- **Ideal Home (1961)** The only known surviving episode of classic ‘Admag’ Jim’s Inn (which ran for 300 episodes). Filmed ‘as live’ from the Olympia Ideal Home Exhibition, publican Jimmy visits the show to review some of the latest time-saving products on offer.
- **At Home with Joy Shelton (1955)** The actress brought a bit of glamour to the domestic setting of this ‘Admag’, including a tour of her own G Plan furniture range.
- **Branston Pickle: Advertising Agency (1957)** This perfectly formed campaign from the legendary Halas & Batchelor animation studio impart a concise and simple message in just 15 seconds.
- **Shell: Rough Running (1957)** Larkin Studios used stylish, modernist graphics to show a car engine running roughly in this cutting edge animation for Supershell ICA petrol.

**FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD**

You are what you eat? Or at least that’s what we’ve been sold. Advertisers have long presented our food choices as much more than just a cure for hunger, but as a key lifestyle decision to keep you and your family happy, fit and healthy as well as saving you time and keeping you on the go. A smorgasbord of culinary delights, reflecting our national obsession with food, this collection charts our changing tastes and attitudes, stocking up our larders and freezers with reliable much-loved family favourites, indulgent treats and long forgotten culinary experiments.

- **Youth Will Be Served (1933)** Somewhat at odds with the public health films of today in tackling childhood obesity, Shooting Stars director Anthony Asquith’s dietary advice for Stork Margarine, promotes fat as a form of “sheer energy” in this depression era advert.
- **Horlicks: Domestic Help (1952)** A husband who is struggling to bring home the bacon is prescribed a cup of Horlicks to restore his spirits and with it a more traditional gender role (in)balance in this archetypal 1950s advert.
- **Heinz Baked Beans: Common Market (1972)** What could be more ‘British’ than a baked bean? Hopes and fears around Britain entering the European common market in 1972 manifested in many ways including this topical, opportunistic ad from Heinz
- **Kelloggs Sugar Smacks: Space Mission Badges (1970)** Fuelling children with a sugar-rush, space flight and moon landing fever made its way to the nation’s breakfast table.
- **Findus Peas: (1961), Findus fish sticks (1963) and Findus Pancakes: Pancake Day (1981)** While they may not have been the height of haute cuisine, Findus’s frozen food products were a staple of household freezers throughout the 1970s and 1980s, proudly proclaiming their convenience as a key ingredient.

**HAPPINESS IS HEGG-SHAPED**

The Egg Marketing Board was incredibly prolific in their film output. This collection a cracking selection of 28 commercials from their heyday, when the likes of football legend George Best, Beryl Reid and comedy giant Tony Hancock were persuading viewers to go to work on an egg.

- **Egg Marketing Board: Tony Hancock - Professional Jealousy (1966)** Hancock and Mrs Cravatte (his Hancock’s Half Hour co-star Patricia Hayes) compete to the spokesperson for the humble egg.
- **Egg Marketing Board: Sheila – No 1 (1964)** Theatre legend Joan Littlewood directed this ground breaking ‘New Wave’ series a year after her musical Oh, What a Lovely War! Was first staged. The Sheila series was produced by Anthony Shaffer (The Wicker Man) and shot by a young Nicolas Roeg.
• **Egg Marketing Board: Bargain – Beryl Reid (1966)** Produced by PR firm Ogilvy and Mather, Beryl Reid cuddles up to a giant egg to promote their value for money.

• **Egg Marketing Board: George Best - Footballer (1970)** A lad meets his soccer hero and discovers the secret of his success on the pitch - an egg for breakfast (€ for B).

**LIQUID REFRESHMENT**

Whether you fancy a nice relaxing cuppa or a swift half, this refreshing collection of drinks adverts hits the spot.

• **PG Tips: Hairdressers (1978)** Johnny Vegas and his tea-swilling sock monkey may be familiar to contemporary viewers but it was the PG Tips chimpanzees who were the stars of the small screen in this award-winning, long-running campaign.

• **Guinness Export: The man – 3 versions (1968)** A would-be Bond knocks down walls, kisses random women and avoids strangulation on the way to his local. Three identikit versions of one advert filmed on the same set with different actors. Guinness frequently used multiple versions to help sell their product to international territories.


**CELEBRITY SELLS**

Celebrity endorsement is one of the advertisers' most powerful weapons. For generations, movie stars, television personalities and sporting heroes have all bought in to selling out. A famous face can trigger a string of associations that advertisers hope will reflect well on the product. And for new faces, an advertising gig can be the path to recognition, and a career which enables you to be the star turn.

• **Guinness: Plinths (1976)** Good things may come to those who wait, but a decade after England’s World Cup triumph, many football fans still felt the bitter taste of the 3-2 defeat by West Germany in 1970. Dick Clement (Porridge) directs Peter Cook and Dudley Moore as alter egos Pete and Dud in this rumination on the beautiful game.

• **Shell: Sammy Davis Jr (1961)** Sammy Davis Jr extols the joys of Shell whilst cavorting around London’s West End in this toe-tapping musical number.

• **Target (1968)** World Cup hat-trick legend, England striker Geoff Hurst sells us “man-size protection”.

• **Pye Cinema & TV Advertising (1970, East Anglian Film Archive at the University of East Anglia)** Fresh from Monty Python’s Flying Circus John Cleese promotes the Cambridge-based electronics manufacturer.

• **Coca-Cola: Hey Coke – Party, Coca-Cola; Hey Coke- Beach and Coca-Cola: Hey Coke – Masquerade Ball (all 1958)** Three years before she first worked with Jean-Luc Godard on Une Femme est une Femme, model Anna Karina, the future French New Wave star, was the public face for a series of Coke ads.

• **Crowning Glory (1936), Sam Goes Shopping (1939)** Look out for a youthful Terry Thomas as a louche ladies’ man in not one but two ads for Amani shampoo and alongside Stanley Holloway for the Co-Op.

• **What We Want Is Watney’s Army (1959)** Look out for a youthful, ale-drinking Michael Caine years before his big break in Zulu.

Behind the camera, too, advertising commissions could kick start a career or offer a lucrative sideline in between film projects.

• **Fiat Strada: Figaro (1979)** Built by robots to an operatic accompaniment from the Barber of Saville by Rossini, classic Hugh Hudson advertising on a grand scale.
• **SAAB: New Delivery, (1985)** (Mediatheque only) Tony Scott’s epic ad pits the new Saab against a Viggen jet fighter allegedly putting him in Hollywood’s sights and in the frame to direct *Top Gun*.

• **The Boy on the Bike (1973)** Sir Ridley Scott’s mini-masterpiece was recently voted by consumers as the most iconic and heart-warming commercial of all time. The BFI-remastered original made a triumphant return to small screens earlier this month, 46 years after its original launch. More on how the remastering process was achieved here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkonymPyp5g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkonymPyp5g)

• Fresh from directing *This Sporting Life* Lindsay Anderson turns his poetic eye to portray the confectionary tastes of the very wealthy at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

• **Kellogg’s: Good morning Trevor (1970)** Fellow British New Wave and Free Cinema filmmaker Karel Reisz (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) intertwines romance and cereal at the breakfast table.

• **Silvikrin Shampoo (1964)** Joseph Losey (*The Servant*) helps model Pattie Boyd achieve salon ready hair with the aid of Silvikrin, just the ticket for the fashionable girl-about-town.

• **Guinness: Hop Farm (1974)** Nicolas Roeg directed this idyllic pastoral scene for Guinness in between *Don’t Look Now* and *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

• **Fable of the Fabrics (1942)** Whiter than white(wash). Before joining Ealing Alexander Mackendrick worked on creative campaigns including this Halas & Batchelor animation, almost a decade before he made *The Man In the White Suit* (1951).

A LOCAL SHOP FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

Screen advertising hasn’t all been national brands and chain stores. Regional ads targeting local goods have been a big hit since the 1920s when local businesses were quick to see the potential of a big screen and a dedicated local audience. While they didn’t have access to the budgets of the national brands, regionally-specific businesses had the benefit of that personal touch.

• **Local Cinema Advertisements - Blaenau Ffestinog and Merthyr (1942, National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales)** A charming wartime snapshot of a local advertising programme featuring an enticing array of products and local services including hairdresser Sadie Snape, Perfecta Dry Cleaners and Lincoln potatoes from R. Anwyl Parry, Potato Merchant.

• **Rowntrees Smarties: The Smarties Palace (1982, Yorkshire Film Archive)** With a (sugar)rush of childhood nostalgia, this classic ad brings a Charlie and the Chocolate Factory inspired child’s fantasy to life. One of a large collection of made for confectioners Rowntree’s of York (now Nestlé), consumed and loved by generations of children (and adults) everywhere.

• **Shippam’s Three Beans (1955, Screen Archive South East) and Shippam’s Guide to Opera (1955)** One of Chichester’s most famous family businesses. Larkins studio animators Animators Vera Linnecar and Nancy Hanna created this delightful musical fantasy for Shippam’s, featuring singing chickens, shrimp, salmon and a operatric chorus of paste pots.

• **Trojan Car (1926)** Many miles are covered here in just one ad. The locations however remain a mystery. The BFI would love to know more about where this quirky advert was shot. To help identify the locations, the public can contribute via our crowdsourcing platform on BFI Player ([https://contribute.bfi.org.uk/#/1/](https://contribute.bfi.org.uk/#/1/))

WHAT WOMEN WANT

Caring mums, hard-working housewives or independent, fun-loving ‘new women’, the female consumer has long been a target of screen advertising. Selling anything from frozen peas to washing powders and luxury soap advertisers have promised to make women’s lives easier and to help them build happy homes and successful relationships.

• **Lux Soap: Sheila Sim (1945) and Margaret Lockwood (1946)** According to their iconic slogan, Lux soap boasted that 9 out of 10 film stars used their product, this series of ads endorsed by leading British film stars injected a bit of glamour into the everyday beauty regime.
- Bournvita: Other Womens Lives (1952-1954) - These mini-documentary portraits of real British working women, using their real names and addresses, made for Cadbury saw busy mothers and wives juggling long busy days of labour with intimate home lives, capped off with a therapeutic cuppa before bed.

- Daz with the Blue Whitener (1967, South West Film and Television Archive South West Film & Television Archive at The Box, Plymouth) - The Daz door step challenge may have cast ordinary housewives, like Mrs Cross, in this long running series, but the star was undoubtedly the whiter than white whites and the iconic box of washing detergent.

- Pex: No-Run Nylons (1965, Media Archive for Central England at The University of Lincoln) - Leicester-based firm Pex’s ‘No-Run’ nylons, were the new innovation for the ‘smart’ working girl on the go.

- Fairy Liquid: Nanette Newman (1980) - Newman was the iconic face of Fairy Liquid in the 1980s, leaving hands that do dishes as soft as ever. Earlier campaigns include a jaw-dropping scene suggesting that Fairy helps married hands keep that single girl look Fairy Liquid: Married Hands (1969).

- Sketchbook of Fashion (1940) - “The key word in the book of fashion is simplicity” This sophisticated wartime advert for Knights Castile soap promotes understated luxury, something to remember in our contemporary climate of consumer excess.

The British Advertising on Screen collection has been made possible by funding from the National Lottery and the additional support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

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ABOUT THE BFI
The BFI is the UK’s lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

• Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
• Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
• Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
• Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

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 Victorian Film collection is accessible through the BFI Player.
ABOUT BRITAIN ON FILM AND UNLOCKING FILM HERITAGE

Britain on Film is one of the largest and most complex archival projects ever undertaken by the BFI and one of the most successful with over 70 million online views to date. Unlocking film heritage for everyone in the UK was a key strategic priority for the BFI (2013-2018). Bringing together a partnership with Regional and National Film Archives and rights holder collections across the UK, this work included a sophisticated programme of data capture, cataloguing, copying to archival standards, meticulous preservation of original materials, thorough searching of archives across the country, new state-of-the-art equipment and digital storage facilities and the transfer of films to the BFI’s online video platform, BFI Player.

Unlocking Film Heritage and Britain on Film have been made possible thanks to £15 million funding from the National Lottery and the additional support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

ABOUT THE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVES

The English Regional Film Archives and other National Film Archives (listed below) hold significant collections of film and video material specifically relevant to their regions or hold dedicated collections such as Imperial War Museums, preserved in specialised storage facilities and made widely available for education, research, communities and the wider public.

UEA’s East Anglian Film Archive
Imperial War Museums
London’s Screen Archives
Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln
North East Film Archive
North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University
Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive
National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive
Screen Archive South East
South West Film & Television Archive at The Box, Plymouth
National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales
Wessex Film and Sound Archive
Yorkshire Film Archive