

Her Majesty The Queen celebrates British film with historic visit to BFI Southbank

Royal film collection to be digitised by the BFI

London: Embargoed until 12.00 noon, Thursday 25th October 2012

Today Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II visited BFI Southbank marking 60 years of the BFI's first permanent cinema on London's South Bank - the National Film Theatre (NFT) in a celebration of British film in this Jubilee year. Hosted by BFI Chair, Greg Dyke and BFI CEO, Amanda Nevill, The Queen unveiled a commemorative 60th anniversary plaque and met a range of BFI staff, local school children and special guests from the world of film, including *The King's Speech* director Tom Hooper and Richard Ayode, director of *Submarine*.

The BFI also announced today that it is working with the BBC to digitise The Royal Collection. The BFI National Archive has looked after the Royal Collection since the late 1960's and is a mixture of films presented to the Royal Household including newsreels and private family films which are unique to the Collection and date back to the late 1920's. Some of the content is already available to the public and some more will be made so, for future generations, through digitisation.

At BFI Southbank The Queen also visited the new BFI Reuben Library, the Mediatheque, the BFI cinemas and also met 16 pupils from Telferscot Primary School, Lambeth. The pupils, aged between 10 and 11 years old, have spent the last three months creating their own animated films based on the Jubilee year and shared their work with The Queen.

Before an invited audience, longstanding BFI supporter Jonathan Ross presented to The Queen a handpicked screening of rare items from the BFI National Archive, including some royal home movies with King George VI,

Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth and Prince Charles as small baby, the first film to feature a monarch – Queen Victoria, *Scenes at Balmoral* (1896) and one of the first ever British films *The Derby* from 1895.

Greg Dyke, BFI Chair said ‘Given that the moving image wasn’t invented until the end of the 19th century I find it extraordinary to think that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has been on the throne for more than half the time that film has been in existence.

When we built BFI Southbank, it was a temporary structure in a less than ideal location under Waterloo Bridge. Who could have predicted then that, 60 years on, film would become one of the world’s greatest and most accessible art forms, supporting a huge industry. And no one would have predicted we’d still be under the bridge!

We need to build on success. And today’s visit from The Queen represents a milestone where we look towards the time when we can build a new Film Centre here on the Southbank that has the scale and magnitude worthy of representing the British film industry.’

Robin Baker, head curator of the BFI National Archive, outlined how the BFI has restored, preserved and spectacularly screened with live scores the nine surviving silent films of Britain’s greatest filmmaker, Alfred Hitchcock which premiered as a key element of London 2012 Festival, the Cultural Olympiad. The presentation included a reel that demonstrates the restoration work that the BFI has undertaken over the last 3 years and the remarkable transformation of the films.

The centrepiece of the big screen presentation was a short programme of rarely seen, silent films from the BFI National Archive showing major milestones and innovations in early British cinema. The programme demonstrated the importance of preserving these films for future generations to enjoy and featured a live piano accompaniment by Neil Brand, one of the world’s leading silent film pianists.

Extracts from the following films were used:

The Royal Collection – private family films (1949 and 1952)

The advent of amateur film gauges produced on safety film transformed the way in which families across Britain were able to record their lives. Among the most beautiful amateur films held in the BFI National Archive are the 16mm Kodachrome films from the Royal Collection. Extract 1 shows a brief scene featuring King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Elizabeth and Prince Charles as small baby. Extract 2 shows the 3-year old Prince Charles riding his pony.

The Derby (1895) - <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/728548/index.html>

This film features the climax of the 1895 Epsom Derby. It was one of the first British films and made by film pioneer Birt Acres. The film was included in the first film presentation to members of the royal family, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, held at Marlborough House on 21 July 1896.

Scenes at Balmoral (1896)

This is the first film to feature a British monarch. The film includes footage of Queen Victoria, Tsar Nicholas II and Turi, the Queen's Pomeranian.

Upside Down or the Human Flies (1899)

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/727647/index.html>

Made by British film pioneer WR Booth, this comedy includes some early trick photography. Indeed, the trick used was later used by Stanley Kubrick in 2001 *A Space Odyssey*.

Dog Outwits the Kidnappers (1908)

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1352979/index.html>

A series of British films featuring a dog called Rover were key in the evolution of what we now understand as film drama. Rover was Britain's first film star and here we see him saving a toddler and driving a car!

The Birth of a Flower (1910)

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/594372/index.html>

Wild Birds at Home (1912) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAPioxP0gaQ>

British natural history filmmakers have led the world since the birth of cinema. These 2 extracts from pioneers Percy Smith and Oliver Pike show flowers unfurling and water birds on their nests. Both films also demonstrate the remarkable range of coloured tints and stencilling that were used in early film.

The Open Road (1926) - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwahIQz0o-M>

This is the first film to show locations across Britain in colour. The film was made using an innovative process devised by Claude Friese-Greene. The selected extracts will show scenes in London.

The Queen unveiled a 60th Anniversary plaque to commemorate her visit and a special gift from the BFI was presented as a souvenir of her visit, a photograph of Her Majesty with Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret on a visit to the set at Ealing Studios in 1946 of Alberto Calvancanti's film *Nicholas Nickleby* and an original poster for the film, released in 1947, designed by Edward Ardizzone.

In the BFI Reuben Library The Queen was shown the following items:

Digitised collections

- Displays relating to *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946)
- Press cutting from the first Royal Command Performance stating 'Film worthy of Royal show' from our Film Critic. Sunday Dispatch, Nov 3 1946.
- Lithograph Poster of First Royal Command Film
- Costume design by Hein Heckroth for David Niven airman character

Library materials

- Picturegoer – special 'filming the coronation' issue May 2nd 1953
- *Animals in Motion* by Eadweard James Muybridge, published in 1902
- What's on in London 1952 – opening of the National Film Theatre special feature
- *Dioptrice: seu demonstratio eorum quae visui & visilibus propter conspicilla non ita pridem inventa accident* by Joannis Kepleri (1653) – second oldest book in the collection

- *The Last Voyage of the Graf Spee* by Michael Powell, signed and donated to the library by Michael Powell himself in 1978 (it's a true story of a naval battle)

Special collections display

- *A Matter of Life and Death*:
 - Emeric Pressburger's handwritten treatment
 - Souvenir programme from Royal Command Performance of the film
 - Telegram from director Michael Powell about changing the title of the film in America [to *Stairway to Heaven*]
- 'Stairway to Heaven' (US title of *A Matter of Life and Death*) production design by Alfred Junge
- Edward Ardizzone pressbook for *Nicholas Nickleby* (1947) and *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1952)
- Director Alexander Mackendrick's annotated and storyboarded script for *The Ladykillers*
- Handwritten treatment for *Chariots of Fire* (1981)
- *Tea with a Kick* (1923) pop up promotional item
- Palace of Varieties handbill

In the Mediatheque, The Queen viewed the following film:

Making Fashion (1938)

Norman Hartnell's Spring Collection is modelled here by a group of society ladies, who pose in a series of extraordinary gowns while Strauss's 'Wine, Women and Song' plays on a permanent loop on the soundtrack. Shot in glorious Dufaycolor (an early and beautifully distinctive colour film process), this is not only an important record of 1930s couture, but also a handy reminder that not so long ago you could be a clothes horse without being a size-zero. This was an atypical subject for director Humphrey Jennings - soon to become one of the most enduring chroniclers of World War Two's home front. Here, he (and Hartnell) appear to have been influenced by Madame Yevonde, doyenne of British society photographers, whose portraits of aristocrats posing as ancient Greek goddesses had recently been exhibited.

– **Ends** –

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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 now 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 Greg Dyke.