



credit: Top row L to R: *Colour on the Thames* (1935), *Blackfriars Bridge* (1896), *Central London Street Scenes* (1923)

Bottom row L to R: *Thames Division* (1955), *The Open Road* (1926/2006), *Railway Bridge Across the Thames* (1968)

BFI celebrates the history of the Thames and the launch of Illuminated River with a specially-curated BFI Player collection of London's iconic bridges on film

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To coincide with the launch of the first phase of **Illuminated River**, an ambitious new public art commission that will eventually see up to 15 bridges lit along the Thames, the BFI have specially curated an online collection of films drawn from the **BFI National Archive**, available now to view for free on BFI Player. **London's Bridges on Film** represents 100+ years of life on the Thames, with the earliest film in the collection, *Blackfriars Bridge* from 1896.

Celebrating the heritage, culture and history of the river these selected films capture the daily interaction of Londoners at work *Thames Division* (1955), *The Open Road* (1926), *Drills at Southwark and New HQ* (1936), *Railway Bridge Across the Thames* (1968) and at play *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959) *Women's Thames Swim* (1921), *Canoe* (1961), *Sidewalk Surfing* (1978) while showcasing the architecture of the bridges themselves *South Bank* (1973), *Ten Bridges* (1957), *Rebuilding of London Bridge* (1967). The collection foregrounds the role of the bridges as vital links unifying both sides of the river with a selection of films from a variety of sources including travelogues, news reports, industrial films, documentaries, fiction film rushes and amateur home movies.

The Thames is London's vital artery, the bridges the unifying branches connecting all points of the capital. The tidal ebb and flow of the river and its bridges has been a draw for filmmakers since the earliest years of the moving image, when Victorian pioneer RW Paul set up his camera on Blackfriars Bridge to record the movement of passers-by. From Westminster Bridge in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, the Millennium Bridge in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* through to Tower Bridge in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and James Bond's

heart-stopping river chase in *The World is Not Enough*, the Thames and its iconic bridges landmarks in their own right, have been central to the projection of London's global identity on screen.

Following the river's progress downstream, this themed collection looks at the history of London through the prism of the Thames, reflecting the city's industrial and economic progress, a place to work and live and enjoy leisure activities as well as an opportunity to interact with nature and the environment and experience the river's unique cultural traditions. Transportation is also key, traversing the river by barge, speedboat, sailing boats, rowing boats, canoes, swimmers and even by barrel.

Following the Thames from its idyllic country setting in the West through the Central London landmarks, past the Pool of London, down to the Docklands and beyond, the river's bridges are seen from multiple angles; underneath from the river itself, looking down from the bridge onto the river, shot from the riverbank, and head on from street level, against the flow of traffic of pedestrians, horse drawn vehicles, bikes, buses, trams, cars, lorries and skateboards. The collection charts the changing look of the Thames along the banks of the river, with a record of the built environment as well as the structure of the bridges themselves documenting demolition, reconstruction and redevelopment.

Taking his place alongside these filmmakers as well as a long line of artists who have been inspired by the Thames, **Illuminated River** artist Leo Villareal has harnessed the latest LED technology to 'paint with light' across the bridge structures, producing sequenced patterns that subtly unfold, using colours influenced by the palettes of Impressionist and English Romantic painters to reveal each bridge's individual history and architectural features, into a unified vision.

The first phase of Illuminated River has now launched with London, Cannon Street Railway, Southwark and Millennium bridges being lit up. The next phase of the project, due for completion in Autumn 2020, will include Waterloo Bridge, the home and physical roof of BFI Southbank, in a stunning new redevelopment of the BFI's riverfront bar and restaurant. The artwork, conceived by internationally-acclaimed American artist Leo Villareal and award-winning British architects Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, and delivered by the Illuminated River Foundation, celebrates the culture, creativity and nightlife of London.

Once complete, the project will be the longest public art commission in the world at 2.5 miles in length, along 4.5 nautical miles of the River Thames and is expected to be seen by over 137 million people during its 10 year lifespan.

Highlights from the London's Bridges on Film collection

- **Blackfriars Bridge (1896)** The earliest film in the collection, RW Paul is interested in the novelty of movement, watching passers-by as they cross the bridge.
- **Tower Bridge Boats on The Thames (1905)** A snapshot of Edwardian London, showing London Bridge busy with horse-drawn traffic, looking to Cannon Street Station and Fishmongers' Hall beyond.
- **Central London Street Scenes (1923)** These atmospheric fog-bound scenes were originally shot for Maurice Elvey's Sherlock Holmes feature *The Sign of Four*, including a climactic speedboat chase down the Thames.
- **The Open Road (1926, released 2006)** Ground breaking cross-country travelogue by colour cinematography pioneer Glaude Friese-Greene, documenting life on the road from Land's End to John O' Groats includes a spellbinding view of London Bridge
- **Arctic London (1929)** During an unusually harsh winter, a frozen trawler the 'Warter Priory' arrives on the river Thames from the North Sea.
- **Opening of the New Lambeth Bridge (1932)** Seen from street level outside Lambeth Palace King George V crosses the newly opened bridge in his carriage followed by a parade of troops and patriotic crowds.
- **Drills at Southwark and New HQ (1936)** Shot from the river on Albert Embankment between Vauxhall and Lambeth Bridge, the film shows construction on the London Fire Brigade's new HQ flanked by two striking 'lost' buildings, the art deco WH Smiths building and Royal Doulton pottery works.
- **Colour on the Thames (1935)** a portrait of a bygone age this strikingly peaceful and undemanding journey down the Thames provides a rare glimpse of 1930s London in colour.

- ***Father Thames (1935)*** Delightful poetic travelogue tracing the river from its humble origins through the heart of the “grime of London”, from Hampton Court in the west to Greenwich Palace in the East.
- ***River Thames Yesterday (1939)*** Shot by legendary cinematographer Jack Cardiff, this Technicolor travelogue takes a gentle journey down the Thames, on the eve of the outbreak of war.
- ***Thames Division (1955)*** (London’s Screen Archives) Engaging documentary on the working life of the Thames river police, the first policing body ever formed as well as the river’s murky past.
- ***Ten Bridges (1957)*** Cockney buskers Wynn and Bill set the mood in this evocative 1950s journey along the Thames taking in life on the river from sunrise to sunset
- ***We are the Lambeth Boys (1959)*** Karel Reisz’s classic Free Cinema portrait of South London teenagers features ‘the boys’ crossing Westminster Bridge, and the banter with passers-by.
- ***Canoe (1961)*** Evocative, colourful amateur film following a canoe trip down the Thames following the canoeists downstream from Surrey to Greenwich, alongside working boats on the river.
- ***Rebuilding of London Bridge (1967)*** (London’s Screen Archives, from Museum of London) Construction work on the new bridge takes place alongside the old bridge being dismantled, before it was famously sold and reconstructed in Lake Havasu City, Arizona.
- ***Railway Bridge Across the Thames (1968)*** A technical triumph, this Informative documentary details the impressive engineering feat taken to construct the new Grosvenor Bridge between Battersea and Pimlico whilst continuing train services into and out of Victoria.
- ***South Bank (1973)*** A report for ‘This week in Britain’ on the redevelopment of the Southbank showing construction of the National Theatre and the NFT, Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall in the shadow of Waterloo Bridge. Made by the COI (Central Office of Information), the programme was aimed at promoting British culture, science and industry to international audiences showcasing the capital’s iconic landmarks.
- ***Sidewalk Surfing (1978)*** A magazine item looking at the explosion of skateboarding culture in the capital and the opening of Skate City at Tower Bridge. This redubbed report for This Week in Britain features some cool moves from a skater, deftly weaving his way across London Bridge.

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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 THE ILLUMINATED RIVER FOUNDATION

An independent charity, the Illuminated River Foundation was set up to deliver the major public artwork, Illuminated River. The Foundation is committed to raising private funding for the installation and maintenance of the project, and has already received generous funding from Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin through the Arcadia Fund, the Rothschild Foundation and the Blavatnik Family Foundation. Seed funding was awarded from the Mayor of London's Office for the initial competition, and from the City of London Corporation for replacing light fittings on London Bridge.

Illuminated River is supported by the Mayor of London, and governed by an independent board of trustees chaired by Neil Mendoza, Chairman of the Landmark Trust and Non-Exec Board Member of DCMS. The Foundation is led by curator and public realm champion Sarah Gaventa, who was formerly Director of CABE Space at the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment.

www.illuminatedriver.london/

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.