



Top L-R: *Feeding the Pigeons in Saint Mark's Square, Venice (1898)*, *Me and My Two Friends (1898)*, *Battle of Spion Kop: Ambulance Corps Crossing the Tugela River (1900)*

Bottom L-R: *The Wonderful Mutoscope (1900)*, *Afternoon Tea in the Garden of Clarence House (1897)*, *Herbert Campbell as Little Bobby (1899)*

BFI National Archive brings history to life by making Victorian Film collection now accessible for all in celebration of Queen Victoria's bicentenary

- Over 700 earliest British films (1895 and 1901) accessible on BFI Player for free and dedicated BFI Southbank Victorian Film Weekender thanks to funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund
- 4K Digital restorations of incredibly rare 68mm large format films
- TV Previews of collaborations with BBC Four series *Victorian Sensations* and *Horrible Histories* (CBBC) featuring Victorian films from the BFI National Archive
- Early filmmakers including RW Paul, Birt Acres, WKL Dickson, James Williamson, Walter Booth, GA Smith, Cecil Hepworth, Walter Gibbons and many more
- Featuring historic events on film for the first time including extraordinary footage from the Boer War, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and key sporting fixtures and more
- Films of key Victorian figures: Queen Victoria, Edward VII, the Duke of Windsor, Tsar Nicholas II, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Pope Leo XIII, W.G. Grace, Prince Ranjitsinhji, Herbert Campbell, Lil Hawthorne, Herbert Beerbohm Tree

****NEWLY AVAILABLE FOR FREE THROUGH BFI PLAYER –
<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/collection/victorian-film>**
[facebook.com/BritishFilmInstitute](https://www.facebook.com/BritishFilmInstitute) | twitter.com/bfi**

For release: 3 May 2019, London

The BFI celebrates 200 years since the birth of Queen Victoria (born 24 May 1819) with the launch of the BFI's entire collection of British Victorian Film made between 1895 and 1901, available to all, for free on BFI Player from 13 May. The online collection is complemented by a Victorian Film Weekender programme of screenings and events at BFI Southbank (9-12 May) including TV previews for broadcast collaborations between BFI and *Victorian Sensations* (BBC Four) and *Horrible Histories* (CBBC), plus innovative BFI education courses offering access to explore the Victorian era and discover more about our earliest films.

Held and preserved by the BFI National Archive, the Victorian Film collection is a vast resource with more than 500 films newly digitised from the best quality source materials thanks to £36,700 of National Lottery funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. With existing Victorian era titles filmed by Mitchell and Kenyon, this gives free access to over 700 films.

BFI silent film curator, Bryony Dixon says *“Early British film is a legacy to be proud of, these rare moving pictures document the last years of Queen Victoria's long reign with a vividness that no other kind of historical artefact can bring. These incredibly rare, fragile film fragments speak volumes, adding colour and texture to our understanding of the Victorians vibrant and rapidly progressing world”*

ABOUT BRITAIN'S FILM PIONEERS AND THE MOVING PICTURE CRAZE

Film historians the world over acknowledge the crucial contribution of Britain's early filmmakers in developing the new medium. The **Victorian Film** collection showcases the incredible range and inventiveness of these dynamic and youthful Victorian pioneers, most of whom were in their twenties and thirties at the birth of film. The story of British filmmaking in this period is one of technical innovation and invention, bravura showmanship and unbridled creativity.

Britain's earliest filmmakers came from a variety of backgrounds, combining an interest in technology and engineering (**RW Paul, WKL Dickson**) a knowledge of photo-chemical process (**Birt Acres, James Williamson**), performers and magicians who had an eye for entertainment (**Walter Booth, GA Smith, Charles Goodwin Norton, Cecil Hepworth**) as well as salesmen with an entrepreneurial flair for new business opportunities (**Charles Urban, Walter Gibbons**).

In the first five years these young British filmmakers put the new medium through its paces, embracing the rapid expansion in technology across a range of genres and formats, even experimenting with early colour and sound; all nascent forms that would later emerge in moving image media across cinema, television and online platforms and shape how we perceive moving image culture today. This new collection gives us the opportunity to marvel at their technical and creative ambition.

Crucially, these new media pioneers recorded the world of the late Victorians themselves with an avid curiosity in the world opening up around them. 120 years on these films give modern audiences an immediacy and deeper understanding of the Victorian period than has been felt before. Like HG Wells' time traveller we are transported back, you almost feel you can reach out and touch the past. The intimate demonstrations of humour, un-guarded tenderness and spontaneity expressed dispels any preconceptions of the sober, austere, buttoned-up Victorians.

The first moving pictures were short in length. At under a minute long their concise capsule storytelling probably has more in common with YouTube and our online and social media culture today than with later films from the cinema industry. Film was a moving picture revolution, literally changing people's perception of reality. Today, as a revolution in the art and technology of moving images is again transforming the way we see the world, it's a good moment to reflect on how the first film audiences saw their own world projected on a big screen.

The collection includes incredibly rare 68mm large format films that have been superbly restored in 4K from the original nitrate prints, under the meticulous supervision of the **BFI National Archive's** conservation team in partnership with archive colleagues at **EYE Filmmuseum** and **Haghefilm** in the Netherlands. At four times the size of 35mm, the quality and clarity of these films is extraordinary.

ABOUT THE FILMS

So many aspects of Victorian life are represented within the collection, there is Queen Victoria herself, including the earliest known moving image of a British monarch, *Scenes at Balmoral* (1896). Filmed on the occasion of a visit by the Tsar Nicholas II the Queen is shown accompanied by members of the royal household and a pack of canine companions, including the Queen's favourite Pomeranian Turi. There is the simple movement of the natural world in popular images of sea waves, including the earliest film in the collection, *Rough Sea at Dover* (1895) and animal life including *Pelicans at the Zoo* (1898), *Feeding the Tigers* (1899), *Spiders on a Web* (1900) and a strong contender for the world's first cat video, the charming four second, *Me and My Two Friends* (1898).

There are bustling street scenes showing the rapid expansion of ever-growing cities and towns across the UK including *Tram Ride at Southampton* (1900), children at play, *Children Dancing With Barrel Organ* (1898) *Lassie and Her Dog* (1901), and adults at work including the much publicised *Launch of the Worthing Lifeboat* (1898) and a wealth of popular factory gates films including the currently unidentified *Workpeople Leaving a Factory* (1900). The films also record the events of the Victorian calendar, from thrilling sporting fixtures such as the *Derby* (1895) and *Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race* (1899) and early football matches, *Blackburn Rovers V. West Bromwich 1898* to covering more extraordinary events, such as the pomp and ceremony of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the first modern mass media event to be captured on film with 40 cameramen from 20 companies covering the 22 June 1897 procession, of which 11 films survive.

In 1899 WKL Dickson took the Biograph camera to South Africa to film the Boer War, the first conflict to be recorded on film. Capturing the action on the very large, very heavy camera, with batteries and tripod all weighing in, would have been extremely challenging. But the precious fragments that have survived are remarkable, giving us a previously unseen insight into life on the front line including footage from *Battle of Spion Kop: Ambulance Corps Crossing the Tugela River* and *Gordon Highlanders in Ladysmith*, both 1900. As well as sending filmmakers abroad to cover the conflict there were also examples of UK-filmed reconstructions of international stories from the Boxer Rebellion, *Attack on a China Mission* (1901) as well as the Boer War, *Nurses Attending The Wounded* (1899). Inspired by the popular illustrated news these films could be seen as early examples of 'fake' news.

The films feature travel extensively as the world opened up to the Victorians. These include the earliest known surviving films of exotic locations such as Venice (*Panoramic View of the Vegetable Market at Venice*, 1898), Paris (*Panorama of the Paris Exhibition No. 3*, 1900) The Alps (*Mount Pilatus Railway*, 1900), Egypt (*Women Fetching Water From The Nile*, 1897), India originally mis-titled as a *Panorama of Calcutta* (1899), the film has been identified as the Ghats at the holy city of Varanasi, and Singapore, *Coolie Boys Diving for Coins* (1900) including exhilarating 'phantom rides' from trains, trams, funicular railways and boats.

The collection includes film records of Victorian entertainers including Percy Honri's banjele-playing *Mister Moon* (1900), Herbert Campbell, Dan Leno's professional partner, promoting their *Jack and the Beanstalk* adaptation, *Herbert Campbell as Little Bobby* (1899), acting legend Herbert Beerbohm Tree emoting the death scene of Shakespeare's *King John* (1899) and the acrobatic spectacle of the internationally known *Deonzo Brothers* (1901). A truly unique record of a major Victorian music hall star, *Kitty Mahone* (1900) allows us to experience American born Lil Hawthorne, (later involved in the Crippen case). Performing one of her hit songs, this is the only surviving example of a synchronised Victorian sound film.

There are thrilling flights of fantasy, *Magic Sword A Mediaeval Mystery* (1901), *The Haunted Curiosity Shop* (1901), literary adaptations, *Scrooge or Marley's Ghost* (1901), entertaining trick films, *Upside Down; or, the Human Flies* (1899), *Artistic Creation* (1901), important for its use of animation, comedy sketches from the visual pun of *Miller and the Sweep* (1897) and *The Barber Saw the Joke* (1900) to the absurd and grisly *Explosion of a Motor Car* (1900), playing on Victorian viewers fears of the new 'horseless carriage'. Capsule dramas developed the origins of film language including milestone moments such as continuity editing to move narrative action on in *Fire!* (1901), and exploring meta in *The Big Swallow* (1901), by playing with the internal logic of film and point of view. This period also records the earliest example of screen advertising for *Rudge-Whitworth Britain's Best Bicycle* (1901) and product placement for *Vinolia Soap* (1898).

As well as Queen Victoria herself there are appearances from a host of popular figures in Victorian society including Edward VII (*King Edward's Arrival at Helsingor*, 1901), his son, The Duke of York (later George V) (*Afternoon Tea in the Garden of Clarence House* (1897), after the Queen's Diamond Jubilee procession), Kaiser Wilhelm II (*Funeral of Queen Victoria: Procession starting from Victoria Station*, 1901) Pope Leo XIII (*Pope Leo XIII Being Seated Bestowing Blessing*, 1898) as well as English cricketing legends WG Grace (*WG Grace Celebrates at Lord's on his 50th Birthday*, 1898) and Prince Ranjitsinhji in the first ever cricket film, *Prince Ranjitsinhji Practising Batting at the Nets* (1897).

BFI SOUTHBANK – THE VICTORIAN FILM WEEKENDER 10-12 MAY

BFI Southbank celebrates the launch of the BFI Player collection and the bi-centenary of Queen Victoria's birth with ***The Victorian Film Weekender (10 May –12 May)***. The programme of events, previews, screenings and discussions, exploring Victorian film and the era in more depth, The weekend opens with a **Victorian Film**

study day (10 May, 10:30am-5:00pm) for invited experts and historians to share their insights into significance and the research, identification, restoration and digital preservation of these early films. Other events include **Heroes of the Victorian Film** (11 May, 16:30) in which a panel will champion a favourite Victorian pioneer and **Screening the Victorians** (12 May, 14:00) with BFI silent curator Bryony Dixon giving an illustrated guided tour through Victorian film. **Six Stories About London in Victorian Film** (10 May, 18:30), tells six tales of life in the capital during the last years of Victoria's reign through film.

BFI Silent Film Curator Bryony Dixon and **John Sweeney and his Biograph Band** reprise last year's spectacular sold out BFI London Film Festival Archive Gala, **The Great Victorian Moving Picture Show** (11 May, 19:00), a highly recommended programme of rare 60mm and 68mm large format films captures details of the Victorian world in exceptional high definition clarity.

BFI Southbank will also host TV previews of two exciting new broadcast collaborations drawing extensively from the BFI National Archive's Victorian Films collection. **BBC Four's** new three part series **Victorian Sensations** takes us to the thrilling era of the 1890s, a decade of rapid and often bewildering discovery and change, which continues to resonate today. Presenter and psychotherapist **Philippa Perry** will join director **Sebastian Barfield** for a special preview of the third episode focusing on the mass-media revolution, encompassing the birth of film. (9 May, 18:15).

The BFI National Archive gets the **Horrible Histories** treatment in an exclusive **Horrible Histories BFI Victorian Film special (CBBC)** with Rattus Rattus and HM Tricky Vicky herself taking viewers on a journey through the early days of British film. Fun for all the family, the Horrible Histories cast and creative team will be on hand for a special preview (19 May at 12:30pm).

Created in partnership with set design students from the **Wimbledon College of Arts**, the **Atrium** at **BFI Southbank** will be transformed for an interactive installation, **VR to VR: Victoria's New Media**, proof that the proliferation of moving images is not just a 21st-century phenomenon.

Whether depicted as young ingénue or grieving widow, a well-rounded character or two-dimensional comic relief, the image of Queen Victoria has become an undisputed icon and a figure around which to navigate changing perspectives on women in power, the monarchy, Britain and its imperial legacy. From archive footage of the monarch herself through to award-winning fictional portrayals, **Victoria: The Queen on Screen** is an entertaining and informative exhibition at **BFI Southbank's Mezzanine Gallery** running from **19 April – 14 July** exploring Victoria's image on screen. With objects drawn from the **BFI National Archive's Special Collections** of photographs, posters and other publicity material, the exhibition also features **loans from Sandy Powell**, for her Oscar-winning costume designs for *The Young Victoria* (2009) and **one of Jenna Coleman's costumes** from the hugely successful ITV series *Victoria*, designed by James Keast and made by renowned London costume house Cosprop.

VICTORIAN FILM AS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

BFI has curated a series of educational events and learning courses designed for young and adult students to discover more about this unique visual record and historical resource.

Re-imagining Victorian Britain is a curated selection of free-to-view titles available to view at the **BFI Mediatheque** in venue at BFI Southbank, exploring how Victorian Britain has been recreated and re-imagined in literary adaptations and other dramas on film and television. Highlights include the murderous barber Sweeney Todd in his earliest surviving film appearance, the racy three-part BBC adaptation of Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* (2005), GW Pabst's evocation of London's sleazy Victorian underbelly in *The Threepenny Opera* (1931) and cult 80s children's series *Moondial* (1988).

BFI presents a new innovative **three-week Victorian Film MOOC (Massive Open Online Course)**, starting 1 July and available to sign up for free on FutureLearn. The 3 week course, will explore the infancy of the new medium, providing a fresh perspective on these surviving first films and the period of rapid innovation they came out of.

In addition there is a three week evening course, **An Introduction to Victorian Film (1895-1901)** takes place across three consecutive Tuesdays at **BFI Southbank** (14, 21, 28 May, 6:30-8:30pm), plus two single day filming workshops (**Vivacious Victorians Live!** 28 May, 10:30am-4:30pm and **Victorian Inventions Live**, 30 May, 10:30am-4:30pm) aimed at 8-12 year olds. Taking participants on a fascinating journey back to the beginnings of British film these events are vividly illustrated with newly-restored material from the BFI National Archive.

Developed out of her extensive research, BFI Curator, Bryony Dixon, is currently writing a book on The Story of Victorian Film. Publication date 2020.

The Victorians Film Weekender (10 May – 12 May), Victoria: Queen on Screen Mezzanine Gallery exhibition and Horrible Histories BFI Victorian Film special are made possible through the generous support of The National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery players. The digitisation of the 68mm large format films was supported by the Eric Anker-Petersen Charity, with additional support from the Michael Marks Charitable Trust, the John S. Cohen Foundation and the London Topographical Society.

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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 BFI SOUTHBANK

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £13.75, concs £11.25 including Gift Aid donation. Members pay £2.20 less on any ticket - www.bfi.org.uk/southbank.

Young people aged 25 and under can buy last minute tickets for just £3, 45 minutes before the start of screenings and events, subject to availability - <http://www.bfi.org.uk/25-and-under>.

Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment

ABOUT BFI MEDIATHEQUE

Explore the digital collections of the BFI National Archive in our free Mediatheque. Whether you're just dropping in before a screening or settling in for some serious research, there's a comfortable viewing space and an exciting journey of discovery waiting for you...

To find out more about our free collections visit bfi.org.uk/mediatheque

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