Celebrating the history, lives and stories from the Commonwealth on Film

Top: left to right Victory Parade (1946), Messages from Bhupen Khakhar (1983), Exercise Musk-Ox (1946), Tins For India (1941)
Bottom: left to right Carnival Fantastique (1960), Ghana - New Nation (1957), Sierra Leone Greets the Queen (1962), Prince Ranjitsinhji Practising Batting at the Nets (1897)

Includes official film records of The Queen on Tour to parts of the Commonwealth
The oldest surviving cricketing film from 1897 between England and Australia in Sydney
A vibrant portrait of acclaimed, self-trained Indian artist Bhupen Khakhar

AVAILABLE FOR FREE THROUGH BFI PLAYER, BFI YOUTUBE AND BFI MEDIATHEQUE

Full online collection: https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/collection/commonwealth-tales
Collection highlights via: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLXvkgGofjDziUv_G0hrkja3_cv1Kx8S-B
facebook.com/BritishFilminstitute | twitter.com/bfi

For immediate release, 16th March 2018, London – To mark the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) taking place in London 16-20th April, the BFI have launched Commonwealth Tales, a new free online collection of films drawn from material held at the BFI National Archive. The modern Commonwealth was formed on 26 April 1949. An intergovernmental organisation comprised of 53 member states, including the UK, and spanning all six inhabited continents, the Commonwealth was established to help maintain global unity through the promotion of democracy, prosperity and peace.

Commonwealth Tales offers a vibrant snapshot of the lives and stories of people in member states, including the UK, across the 20th Century, both before and after the foundation of the Commonwealth. Films have been donated to the BFI National Archive from a variety of sources comprising travelogues, newsreels, government sponsored films, documentaries, TV News coverage and a wealth of home movies and amateur films, many of which have never publicly been seen before. Highlights include the earliest film in the collection, Prince Ranjitsinhji Practising Batting at the Nets (1897), the oldest surviving cricketing film features Indian Prince ‘Ranji’ Ranjitsinhji preparing for the first test between England and Australia in Sydney. Victory Parade (1946) celebrates soldiers from the far reaches of the British Empire as they arrive in London to take part in the official commemoration of the end of war in Europe, three years before the formation of the Commonwealth.

Carnival Fantastique (1960), Trinidadian actor/singer turned filmmaker Edric Connor’s vibrant documentary, captures the local colour of Trinidad’s famous street carnival in all its glory. Ghana - New Nation (1957) offers a snapshot of postcolonial Ghana in its year of independence, including an interview with Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first Prime Minister. Bold and bright, Arts Council documentary, Messages from Bhupen Khakhar (1983), paints an engaging portrait of the self-trained Indian painter, the subject of a posthumous Tate retrospective in 2016, as he reflects on his modest life and flamboyant work. Exercise Musk-Ox (1946)
is a remarkable chronicle capturing every step of the 3,100 mile long journey carried out by the Canadian Army as they cross the treacherous icy terrain of the Northern Canadian wilderness.

Audiences will have an opportunity to access and engage with the collection in 3 different ways; online via BFI Player, available to UK viewers, with a range of films from 1897 to 1992. A separate playlist will also be available on the BFI’s YouTube Channel, for UK and international viewers, with a selection of films taken from the BFI DVD ‘COI Collection Volume Seven: The Queen on Tour’, official film records providing unprecedented access to royal tours and state visits across the Commonwealth, as well as films from the BFI National Archive’s unparalleled India on Film 1899-1947 collection of rare early films of India and Indian life. The full India on Film 1899-1947 collection is also available to UK audiences via BFI Player.

In addition a BFI Mediatheque curated selection of themed television and documentary titles, available to browse in venue at BFI Southbank, includes such highlights as 28Up South Africa (2013), the South African spin off of Michael Apted’s celebrated Up series. Asian Provocateur (2015) sees British comedian Romesh Ranganathan’s travel to his ancestral homeland of Sri Lanka to connect with his roots and learn about the culture, plus Dream House (1953) an advert for Dunlopillo mattresses starring legendary Indian actors Meena Kumari ‘The Tragedy Queen’ and Ashkok Kumar.

Many of the films featured in Commonwealth Tales have been digitised and made available thanks to the BFI’s National Lottery-funded Unlocking Film Heritage programme, including a selection of titles drawn from the newly digitised Royal Geographical Society’s film collection.

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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 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. http://player.bfi.org.uk/
ABOUT BFI MEDIATHEQUE
Free to access BFI Mediatheques offer users an opportunity to explore the digital collections drawn from the BFI National Archive and partner collections, at select UK-wide locations including BFI Southbank.

ABOUT CHOGM
For further details on the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting please visit https://www.chogm2018.org.uk/
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