

**Institution:** Birkbeck, University of London

**Unit of Assessment:** 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

**Title of case study:**

London Screen Studies Collection: bring London's film heritage to light

**1. Summary of the impact**

The London Screen Studies Collection (LSSC) based in Birkbeck School of Arts has played the key role in centralising, cataloguing and publicising the historic creative moving image record of London in the twentieth century. With the support of funding from Film London and UK Film Council Digital Film Archive Fund, it made a significant contribution to Screen Heritage UK, the £25 million project managed by the British Film Institute. Its ongoing collaboration with Film London has resulted most recently in a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. In addition, it led to a new exhibition at London Film Museum and a new initiative with a significant collection of historic industrial films in East London.

**2. Underpinning research**

The London Project began in 2004 as a strand within the AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies (2000-2005), based at Birkbeck, University of London, under the leadership of Professor Ian Christie. It mapped and analysed how the new medium of film made its considerable impact upon the social and economic life of the city in the early twentieth century (1894-1914), shaping the cultural geography of London thereafter. Hitherto there was scattered research on pioneer filmmakers and on the history of cinema buildings in a number of London's boroughs, but this study involved fundamentally rethinking three areas of 'film history' (helped by a specialist seminar at the AHRB Research Centre, Birkbeck in 2003, 'Film History in Question?').

An important focus of the project was the correlation of knowledge about exhibition and production, and the emergence of distribution as a distinct sector of the trade: the range of businesses considered to be part of the film industry significantly expanded beyond producers, to include ancillary suppliers of all kinds (reflected in the scope of data collection and eventual on-line database). Further, attention was paid to the geography of the emerging business, noting clusters of related business, eventually leading to Dr Simon Brown's paper applying theories of 'new business agglomeration' to the Cecil Court concentration of the early industry (Ref 1). Finally, the importance of *audience* was emphasised, leading to new research drawing on oral history, autobiography and a greatly expanded range of sources (with Dr Luke McKernan's papers, and Professor Christie's papers and book *Audiences* (Refs 2-5), evidence of the productivity of this new direction.

The first major research output of the London Project was its database of cinemas and film businesses in London, 1894-1914 (Ref 6). This led to the creation of the London Screen Studies Collection (LSSC), an accessible reference library of viewing copies of moving image material made in or about London. This material is wide ranging and often otherwise inaccessible, covering everyday life and significant events in the 32 London boroughs from the 1930s to the present day. In 2011 a large number of viewing copies on DVD of films from local authorities was received. The collection now numbers over 1300 films on DVD. As well as feature films and TV programmes, it includes a vast amount of footage from local authority archives: amateur films, home movies, film societies' outputs, public information films and records of civic events. Most material has been donated, including: a complete run of LWT's 'The London Programme' donated by the producers; London films donated by filmmakers (*Lightermen*, *A13 Road Movie*); a large number of films from

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the London Transport Museum; and film from projects such as the online filmmaking challenge 'London Recut'. The database (launched in 2007 by the LSA) remains a work-in-progress. It continues to grow steadily, maintained by Angela English, under the guidance of Professor Christie, and has been supplemented by information sent by users worldwide via email, many of whom are engaged in family history research.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Simon Brown, '[Flicker alley: Cecil Court and the emergence of the British film industry](#)', *Film Studies*, 10 (2007), pp. 21-33. ISSN (print) 1469-0314
2. Luke McKernan, 'Diverting Time: London's Cinemas and their Audiences', in the [London Journal](#), vol. 32 no. 2 (July 2007), available by kind permission of Maney Publishing;
3. Ian Christie, 'The Long History of London Screen Entertainment', in *Extended Cinema: le cinema gagne du terrain* (Campanotto, Udine, 2010). A version of this article can be viewed [here](#).
4. Ian Christie, "'All that life can afford?": perspectives on the screening of historic literary London', in R Handa, J. Potter, eds., *Conjuring the Real: The Role of Architecture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, University of Nebraska Press, 2011
5. Ian Christie (ed), *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, Amsterdam University Press, 2012
6. London Project [on-line database](#) of early film businesses, 1896-1914: *The Birth of the film business in London*

#### Grant:

1 Oct 2000 – 30 Sept 2005 AHRB Centre for British Film and Television Studies grant (£888,326). The award was held jointly with Sheffield Hallam University, University of Ulster, Central Saint Martins College, University of Exeter & the University of Brighton. Birkbeck led the project with its share of £322,176. PI: Prof L Mulvey until Oct 2003; then Professor Ian Christie to Sept 2005.

### 4. Details of the impact

London's Screen Archives (LSA), a network of London-based archives, formed in 2006 and funded by the regional screen agency Film London, Birkbeck, and (initially) Museums, Libraries and Archives (MLA) London, has remained a mainstay of the London Screen Studies Collection (LSSC). Film London sponsored three projects which developed out of LSSC between 2006 and 2010 (Discovering London's Screen Archives, 2009-2010; London's Screen Archive: Network Development Phase 2, 2007-2009; The London Screen Archive, 2006). Its ongoing active involvement in developing and promoting LSSC reflects and sustains the impact of the London Project which laid the groundwork for ongoing discovery, digitisation and public access to London's film archives. The partnerships developed and the non-academic funding gained for these activities testifies to the recognition by the British Film Institute (BFI) and Film London of the significance of this project to opening up London's screen heritage (Testimonials 1 & 2). It has also resulted in an important new exhibition at the London Film Museum, a new initiative to pilot engagement with a significant industrial film archive, and international recognition.

Public engagement with LSSC began with a touring exhibition about the beginnings of London filmmaking, *Moving Pictures Come to London 1894-1914*. Co-funded by the London Centre for Arts and Cultural Exchange, 2007-9, it toured 10 London boroughs, visiting local history archives and libraries, with over 15 accompanying talks and screenings of local film.

At the invitation of the MLA and Film London, LSSC participated in *Their Past Your Future*, a project sponsored by the Big Lottery (£22,000) which resulted in a DVD of archive film from

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London collections, *Their Past Your Future: London in the 1940s* (2008), commemorating the end of World War II. This was followed by *London Rediscovered: A Panorama of London films from the 1950s* (2011), a selection of films from the 1950s from public-sector archives. Funded by Film London and the UK Film Council Digital Film Archive Fund, over 500 copies of both DVDs were requested by and sent to London's schools, libraries, local history societies and archives, and community agencies. (Source 10)

In 2009, London's Screen Archives YouTube Channel was established by the LSSC on behalf of LSA, showcasing archive films, clips and shorts made from 1896 to the present day. By July 31 2013, there were 125 films with over 2000 subscribers and over 750,000 views. (Sources 5 and 6)

In 2010, *Screening Our Memories* was developed in partnership with Picturehouse Cinemas. Funded by Film London it provided public in-cinema archive screenings, reminiscence and intergenerational events. It involved 14 project participants, piloting training workshops at various venues in greater London for age care workers and film educators on using archive film to promote reminiscence among older people and people with dementia. Staff from Age Concern and a number of arts organisations took part in one-day training sessions. A training toolkit (written by Jenny Davison and Angela English in 2011) remains available on request. (Source 7)

In 2011-12, Film London (Audience Development and Digital Film Archive Fund) and the BFI Transition Fund sponsored LSSC's public screenings of London-related films, in Birkbeck Cinema, Bloomsbury, and Stratford Picturehouse, grouped around such themes as 'Musical London' and 'Experimental London'. This included the Dickens' London Season at BFI Southbank. The project exceeded its KPIs, with over 1100 attending 43 screenings and over 1500 new subscribers to the YouTube channel by the end of the project.

LSSC made a significant contribution to Screen Heritage UK (SHUK), a £25 million project managed by the BFI between 2008 and 2012 to establish a coherent and sustainable framework for the cataloguing, preservation and digitisation of films in Britain's national and regional film archive collections. BFI appointed Professor Christie as a board member for this project, and for its subsidiary, *Revitalising the Regions*. The LSSC at Birkbeck College now holds viewing copies of the 1100+ London borough films digitised under Screen Heritage UK.

In 2012, Film London, with the support of LSSC, won HLF funding to develop a major three-year project focused on the moving image history of 15 London outer boroughs. 'London – A Bigger Picture' will engage local communities in the capital, to inspire interest and ownership in their local screen heritage. (Testimonial 1)

In addition, Professor Christie was invited to co-curate the London Film Museum exhibition (Covent Garden), *Lights Camera London*, drawing on LSSC research, which opened in January 2013, with an estimated 25,000 visitors (Testimonial 3, Source 8). The LSSC was also instrumental in the development of a knowledge exchange partnership with New Media Networks to pilot public engagement approaches to Tate & Lyle's significant collection of historic industrial films in East London (World in the Cube Project, funded by CreativeWorks London, March to October 2013). New Media Networks approached Professor Christie because of his role in developing and maintaining the London Screen Study Collection, to support and develop their 'World in a Cube' project to explore the potential value of digitising and making accessible the Tate & Lyle film archive. (Testimonial 4, Source 9)

Internationally, the impact of this work is reflected in invitations from Paris (Sorbonne and Forum des Images); and universities in Udine, Canberra, Stockholm (x2), Netherlands (Groningen and Amsterdam) and Lincoln, Nebraska, requesting Professor Christie to speak on London's film history and on-line access to local archive film, such as the 2011 conference *Film Archives in the Digital Era* at the Swedish Royal Library and Stockholm University, and 'London Calling', a major

retrospective of London's screen heritage at the Forum des Images in Paris, Winter 2011-12. Finally, a new website linking maps and film, [www.thecinetaurist.net](http://www.thecinetaurist.net), has been developed on the basis of the methodology developed in the London Project for LSSC (Source 10).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. London Screen Heritage Manager, Film London (factual statement)
2. The lead curator of non-fiction film, BFI (factual statement)
3. Founder and Director, London Film Museum (factual statement)
4. Co-director of New Media Networks (factual statement)

Other corroborating sources

5. Ian Christie's report supplying KPIs on LSSC's outreach programme, supported by BFI Transition Fund 2011-12: 'Discovering London's Screen Heritage Project'. Supplied on request
6. London's Screen Archives [YouTube Channel](#)
7. *Screening Our Memories*, a practical guide, developed by Jenny Davison, manager of day centres for elderly people, and Angela English, in partnership with Picturehouse Cinemas. It provides details of the 14 project participants, including Age Concern and Hackney Homes. (Supplied on request)
8. [Lights, Camera, London!](#): exhibition at London Film Museum, Covent Garden. See also the [Evening Standard review](#)
9. See World in the Cube project at [CreativeWorks London](#) and [New Media Networks](#)
10. Roland-Francois Lack developed his innovative study in cine-mapping by building on LSSC methodology: [Robert Paul in London c.1900: tour guide and filmmaker](#)