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**The Searchlight Archive collection at the University of Northampton.  
A Research Note****By: Daniel Jones<sup>1</sup>**

Opened in the summer of 2013, the Searchlight Archive at the University of Northampton offers researchers one of the largest collections of material on the far right and anti-fascist movements in Europe. The University of Northampton is very grateful to Gerry Gable, Editor of *Searchlight* Magazine, for allowing us to house this material, and place it in the public domain. Consisting of hundreds of boxes of unique material, with around 350 presently on our catalogue, the archive has already welcomed dozens of researchers (from undergraduate dissertation students to professional academics), and has contributed to numerous articles and papers too.

This resource has a wide range of applicability into on-going research into the history and contemporary dynamics of radicalism. So far, researchers have only scratched the surface of its relevance for emergent debates into themes such as networking and transnational forms of extremism, gender and far right activity, and the roles played by civil society in counteracting the impact of ultra-nationalism.

*Background*

The collection is the product of a unique history of anti-fascist activity that developed in post-war Britain. This anti-fascist movement is itself a response to a small but virulent culture of neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic activity in the UK. Its origins can be traced to the Jewish groups that developed around the period of the Second World War to campaign against on-going fascist sympathy in Britain. In particular, at this time a small organisation known as the 43 Group was formed to defend Jewish communities from anti-Semitism and

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<sup>1</sup> Archivist for the Searchlight Archive; all images in this article were provided by the Searchlight Archive.

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fascists in London. The 43 Group, which included figures such as Vidal Sassoon, eventually felt that it had broken the back of the returning Union Movement under Mosley and it went into abeyance.

Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s the British extreme right reformed into groups such as the National Socialist Movement and the Greater Britain Movement, led by a new generation of activists, such as Colin Jordan as John Tyndall, supported by the on-going activities of older figures such as A. K. Chesterton. This resurgent anti-Semitic right forged fresh alliances with international Nazis and established, with the leader of the US Nazi Party George Lincoln Rockwell in 1962, the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS).

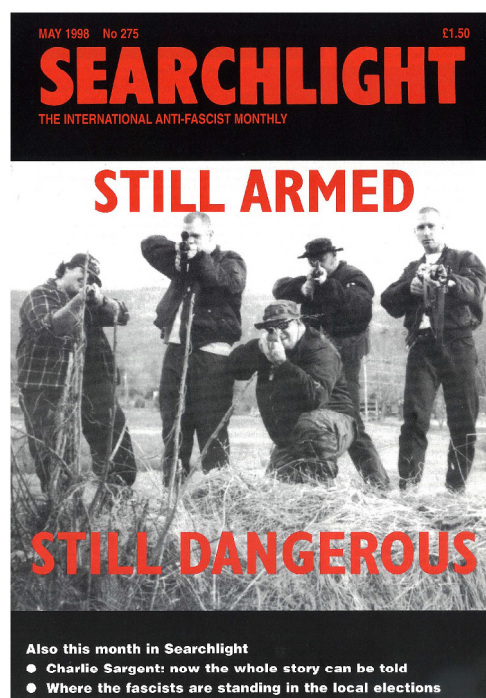
In response to this new wave of activity, the 43 Group began to reform and re-organise – this time on a broader base, and no longer as a Jewish defence group but rather a movement for all those wanting to stop the resurgent anti-Semitic right of the early 1960s. The 62 Committee, as it was known, realised that it could not oppose the rise of such extremism purely through street level activism. To achieve this, along with trade unionists and the support of traditional politicians from the party system, in 1964 they set up a new organisation, Searchlight, as an intelligence unit to report on and campaign against the far right on a broad front. Its techniques were unique, and drew on campaigning journalism as well as an influence from French cultures of resistance during the Second World War.

Though it published a newspaper for several issues, Searchlight's initial success came as a press agency for the first decade of its existence. It covered the major developments of the extreme right in Britain, such as the consolidation of several smaller groupings into the National Front in 1967. In 1975, following the success of its exposé on the National Front, a pamphlet called *Well-Oiled Nazi Machine*, Searchlight metamorphosed into a regular monthly magazine dedicated to monitoring and reported on the far right. This was focused on Britain, but also led to investigations covering extremist

activity in Europe America too. As such, Searchlight became networked with a wide range of coverage on the far-right activity and also on anti-fascist and anti-racist activity too.

Searchlight's accomplishments continued throughout the 1980s, into the 1990s and right up to the present day. In this time, investigations have covered the linkages between British and American activists though groups such as Combat 18; the impact of European organisations on British contexts, such as the growth of Jean Marie Le Pen's Front National; and the networking of the international Holocaust denial movement too.

The links that Searchlight has developed, from people on the ground infiltrating the far right to the connections with anti-fascist organisers across the country, through to garnering the goodwill of parliamentarians across Europe and departments in the US and other nations, is reflected in the material. It is one of many reasons why the collection gives researchers a unique opportunity to understand, in a single archive, a wide range of issues. It allows researchers the opportunity to interpret not only the politics, but the broader senses of culture and community found both in extremist movements, as well as those who have opposed them.



### *The Structure of the Archive and Types of Material Held*

Brought to the University of Northampton in 2012 and opened to researchers a year later, the collection has already grown a reputation among specialist researchers. It is also a growing collection, as it has continued to be added to as further holdings have been

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recovered by Searchlight, and placed together to create at Northampton the unique wealth of material relating to their work monitoring the far right. Although it is still a growing archive, and boxes are still being added, we have been keen to allow access to the collection for researchers from an early stage.

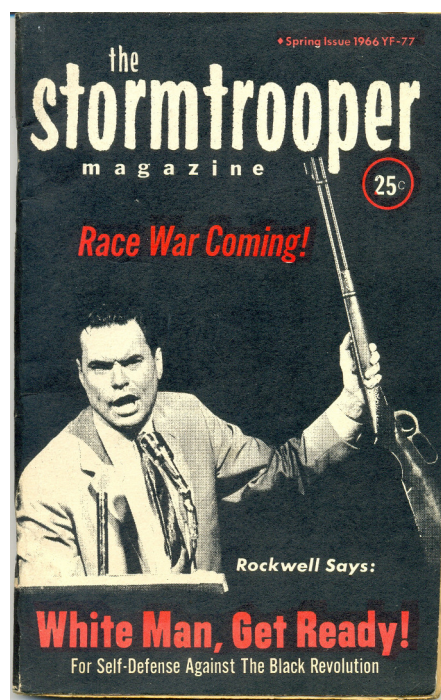
The material is organised into 18 series and 87 sub-series, a number that is still growing. In this way, the archive has been set out to allow researchers to quickly get to grips with the material. The largest section of material, that on far right movements, is set out in a geographical fashion too - with the British National Party (1982 formation) being found in the British series sub-series 03, for example. The other sections are arranged by the organisational theme. These include anti-Communism, cultures of anti-Semitism, and links with traditional conservative and even anarchist politics. There are papers relating to Searchlight itself. Here, there is some material covering the administration of Searchlight, and some papers relating to the investigations that Searchlight undertook. Finally, the collection also contains a small book and pamphlet collection, accrued by Searchlight over the decades. The material also covers a wide range of topics and shows historical movements, development of law and interaction of law with society, the art and aesthetic of the far right and anti-fascism, methods of radicalisation and combatting extremism and many others.

Within this layout, the collection has given an order to a huge range of materials, allowing researchers to approach the archive with a range of methodologies. The material itself includes a wealth of published material, spanning runs of various far right magazines and newspapers, to the publications of mainstream and left wing groups that have opposed such extremism. Many of these publications are not available elsewhere, or help to complement collections in other archives and libraries, which have in intermittent holdings of such clandestine literature. These magazines and newspapers, also gathered from Searchlight allies across the world over the years, often offer significant or effectively

complete runs of the ideological outpourings of movements on the extremes of the political spectrum. The archive also contains various photos and other visual material gathered by those investigating the movement, as well as a collection of anti-fascist posters and art.

The archive also offers truly unique opportunities for researchers in terms of the internal circulars, leaflets and other ephemera, such as election posters developed by the far right movements catalogued. Whether it is the correspondence between fascist leaders, or confessional and hate mail sent by the far right into Searchlight, by their nature these types of resource will not be found anywhere else. The ephemera, often items that would be thrown away and never intended for long life, such as racist stickers or election leaflets, have also been saved by Searchlight in order to allow a more total recreation of the activity of these groups and not limiting the researchers to the magazines and other more refined media output.

Lastly, the investigative records and internal documentation generated by Searchlight, which the archive contains, also opens up some exciting fields of study for researchers investigating forms of anti-fascism. This spans a wide range of issues, such as looking at the minutes and agendas of left wing anti-racism groups, exploring investigations into the financial malpractices of far right organisations, or attempts by Searchlight and others to chase down and reveal War Criminals in the UK and change the law.



Finally, we have a project to digitise some of the material in the archive too. This allows us to make the material word searchable, allowing visitors to examine a wide range of material when they visit the resource.



*Access*

Researchers are advised that access is limited, but we do aim to welcome everyone to the Searchlight Archive, and provide support to research. This includes undergraduate



researchers and postgraduate researchers, as well as professional academics and others pursuing legitimate research into this area. Nevertheless, due to the sensitive nature of the material, we operate an access request system, and cannot guarantee availability to all. Please contact us to find out more. The archive catalogue is fully searchable online, and is located at <http://library.northampton.ac.uk/archive>. If you want to find out more, simply go to Collections and then S to find Searchlight. There are links on the collection

description to the access request form, which includes our current hours. Based on the University of Northampton's Park Campus, we look forward to welcoming researchers in the coming months and years.

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