

# **Living Film Histories: Researching at The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum by Phil Wickham and Helen Hanson**

## **Abstract**

The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter is both a public museum and a research and teaching resource originally based on the collection put together by filmmaker Bill Douglas and his friend Peter Jewell. Augmented constantly with new donations it now holds over 85,000 items.

In this article we will demonstrate how the range and depth of the museum's collections on moving image history creates a 'people's history' of the medium. Despite the diversity range of the holdings, this delivers a coherence to the museum for researchers, allowing scholars to evidence continuities as well as changes across this history. We will show how this works in three distinct ways. Firstly we will consider how research on the everyday ephemera from cinema and the optical media that preceded it that forms much of the collection, such as programmes, publicity material or merchandise, can illuminate our understanding of film history as it is lived; what Raymond Williams saw as 'the structures of feeling' underpinning popular culture.

Secondly we will draw on examples from the stipend scheme we operate where awards enable researchers from around the world to explore our holdings to discover new paths through this history. How has material found within collections

complicated research questions or allowed scholars to make connections between the past and the present?

Lastly we will explore how artefacts gain meanings from the processes of their curation. Here I will analyse the curatorial practices by students at the University of Exeter.

#### Key Words

Museum

Curation

Film

Cinema History

Optical media

Bill Douglas

Audiences

Archives

#### Authors' Biography

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television, and is currently co-editing a book on Bill Douglas's life and work. He was previously a curator at the BFI.

Professor Helen Hanson is Associate Professor of Film History at the University of Exeter. She is the Academic Director of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. She has written widely on histories of the Classical Hollywood Cinema from the perspectives of gender, genre, aesthetics, labour, industry and production. She is the author of *Hollywood Soundscapes: Film Sound Style, Craft and Production* (BFI, 2017) and *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (I B Tauris, 2007). She is currently researching women's work below the line in Classical Hollywood, with a particular focus on sound work.

## Introduction

The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter is a resource that offers myriad opportunities for researchers to find new paths through moving image history. While some scholars may be familiar with the collections, they can be used and interpreted in many different ways. In this article the Curator and Academic Director of the museum illustrate and explore these possibilities, arguing that material culture, such as the artefacts held by the museum, can both stimulate new ways of thinking about research and enrich existing projects.

The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum is the leading museum of moving image history in the UK; no other venue is as accessible to researchers, nor offers a collection of such breadth and depth. As well as being a research and teaching facility for the University of Exeter and the wider academy it is also an accredited public museum, free and open to all every day of the week. The museum was founded through the collection that the renowned filmmaker Bill Douglas put together over a period of 30 years with his friend Peter Jewell. Originally comprising a handful of books, the collection became a project in which the two friends tried to cover a broad and representative history of the moving image from material they found in second-hand shops, antiquarian booksellers and auctions. From popular film it developed along with their interests to include the optical media that preceded cinema. Following Douglas's death in 1991, Jewell searched for a home for their collection, which they had long intended should form a museum to be shared with others. The University of Exeter offered a space to house the collections, and areas for display and research. The collections were acquired by the University in 1994, and the doors of the

museum were opened to the public three years later. Over the last 25 years the holdings have grown significantly, both through further donations from Jewell, and from many others, ranging from major collections, such as those from Roy Fowler or Townly Cooke, to individual items brought in by members of the public.

There are now over 86,000 items held and as the museum's profile has grown with the public this continues to rise exponentially. Over the last decade or more the museum has become established as an essential destination for film fans and scholars alike. The collection is integral to learning; used in over a hundred classes a year at the University of Exeter across a range of disciplines.

In 2010 Wickham published an article demonstrating the importance of ephemera and material culture as a way of linking films as texts with the contexts in which they are made and consumed (Wickham, 2010). He analysed how a number of artefacts from the collection, from programmes to calendars to scrap books and soap dishes offered fruitful sites for understanding the integration of cinema culture in everyday life. In this piece we aim to highlight how the varied holdings of the collection have been animated by the activity and engagement of a wide range of researchers from distinct disciplinary backgrounds and different career stages. This cohort of researchers encompasses undergraduate students, doctoral students, early career, senior researchers and practice-led researchers. Through the different lenses of their research projects, we aim to highlight the varied uses and insights that the museum's holdings can foster. Ultimately we try to showcase the many ways in which this activity understands the relationships between moving image cultures and their audiences.

We will do this by firstly considering what these kind of collections can offer us through four different kinds of material held in the museum; items from the nineteenth century produced to accompany visits to the panorama; cinema publicity ephemera from both the 1920s and the last five years; campaign materials for British films produced in the little explored period in British filmmaking after the First World War and production materials from those in different positions within the filmmaking process and how this can open up new definitions of a film archive. This analysis will be framed by Raymond Williams' writing on the understanding of 'lived culture' and 'structures of feeling', which we believe is still very pertinent in understanding the importance of these materials (R.Williams,1954:21; R.Williams,1961/1994:61). Ephemera can reveal the assumptions, attitudes, and shared experiences that Williams emphasises within these concepts, which he aired first in 'Film and the Dramatic Tradition' and later expanded in *The Long Revolution*.

We will then go on to describe how researchers have used the museum. In particular, the work undertaken by beneficiaries of a stipend scheme generously funded by Peter Jewell, our principal donor. This scheme, has brought over thirty scholars to the museum since 2017 to create new research from its collections. We invite applications and select projects that we believe propose the most interesting, original and productive uses of the museum's holdings, and those that will most benefit from access to our collections. These can be from scholars at any career stage from the UK or abroad, ranging from those just starting out to established names, or indeed artists or filmmakers excited to respond to our artefacts. The stipend funds a visit to Exeter to work with the collections (and we are beginning to instigate remote research solutions if preferred). The arrangement includes an agreement to write a blog describing and analysing the research process at the

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museum, which is published on its website. In this article we will also explore the pedagogical work by which students have used the holdings to form their own analyses of film history by creating exhibitions. This work demonstrates that collections are brought to life by a dynamic dialogue offering different possibilities with each encounter between researcher, academic, practitioner, students, and the artefacts. While there are items from all over the world in the collections, Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell, and most of our other donors, have acquired material primarily in Britain and the 'structures of feeling' that can be mined here are particularly significant in understanding the British experience or other culture's relations with Britain.

The museum's holdings can illustrate change as the medium evolves and audiences' experiences are transformed by tastes and technologies. However, we see moving image culture as a continuum, from the earliest items the museum holds, books on projection from the seventeenth century, to the latest piece of Bond merchandise and across the collections there are patterns of continuities that can be mapped and traced (R. Williams, 1961/1994,p.60). A broad and varied collection, such as the one we hold, coheres around these continuities in the way audiences search for the same meanings and sensations across time. This is why we often refer to the museum as a 'people's history' of the moving image; the diverse items within it are unified by their contribution to understanding how audiences have experienced moving images and how those experiences have shaped their world. This experience is also naturally in turn defined by the society and the moment in which they live so that change and continuity co-exist in every artefact. Primary sources can be one of the few routes into understanding what the nature of this experience

was for the viewer, as such artefacts embody evidence that can be decoded by the researcher. What they might offer most of all is an insight into what Williams calls 'lived culture', which is informed by the common bonds of 'structure of feeling', which is 'as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity' (1961/1994:p.61). Williams sees the arts as the key site to recover this feeling, 'by the fact that here in the only living examples we have of recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon'(1961/1994, p.61). Plays, books, artworks or indeed films can certainly help us in this endeavour, but each new production or screening is reinterpreted by contemporary participants, informed by their own 'structures of feeling'. The ephemera left behind from the consumption of these arts however offers a link to this mindset, made intelligible by being mediated by its historical moment and cultural specificity.

The museum's earliest items in this history can offer an insight into both continuities with the present and to the 'structures of feeling' underlying their original use. The museum holds the UK's leading collection of ephemera and sources on the panorama entertainments that were popular from the 1790s onwards. The panoramas themselves hardly ever survive; enormous 360 degree canvases that would have been repainted with new scenes after use. What endures are guides and keys to the panoramas; souvenirs that would have been sold at the shows. They form evidence of what it might have been like to participate in the immersive experience of the panorama and the 'structures of feeling' that they represented. Some of the panorama guides depict new views of London or recent events – we hold items relating to the Battle of Waterloo panorama shown in the West End in



1816 – but many of them are bringing the world to the British viewer, for instance the arctic or Moscow in EXEBD 77253 and 77254). This creates a sense for the viewer of navigating a new experience, of the immersive properties of the panorama enabling knowledge of new places and cultures (however illusory that might be). As Dr Tiago de Luca, who researched at the museum as part of a stipend award in 2017, has noted, many panoramas, particularly as the nineteenth century progressed, depicted journeys around the world. He argues that ‘they were implicated within a globalist culture that shifted the way humans imagined themselves in relation to the world. This shift was both part and parcel of wider social transformations, including the rise of the tourism industry, new modes of transportation and, not least, colonialism’(2017). Examining these promotional and merchandising items from the panorama can help researchers to track the role of visual culture in the beginnings of globalisation, imperial propaganda, and how audiences began to conceive of the world beyond their own immediate surroundings. The museum has enhanced the possibilities that these original materials offer by acquiring the research papers of the late Ralph Hyde, Britain’s foremost expert on the panorama, which offers a hugely comprehensive collation of sources and evidence to support study of this media form and its ideations and representations of the world.

While De Luca’s interpretation demonstrates the historical specificity of the items, others have used them to draw continuities to today. Another stipend researcher, Dr Jenna Ng, who visited in 2018, explored the close conceptual relationship between the panorama and cutting-edge research into virtual reality, whereby both media ‘prioritise(s) a point of view of its world placed operationally under the user’s control’ (2018). Ng, an expert in interactive media, notes in the blog she produced for us

about her research that not only do both panoramas and VR headsets aim to serve 'visually hungry audience who wanted to be transported to different realities' but there are also similarities in affect through immersion, from wonder to nausea' (2018). Continuities and changes in affect from the nineteenth century to the present day through the collection are also something that can be the subject of extended study; Doctoral researcher Isabel Alexander is examining the nature of immersion and subjectivity through close readings of some of the artefacts, particularly handmade items produced by women. This is the sort of research that can only be undertaken through a direct, physical relationship with the materials to make connections through 'structures of feeling'.

Collections and archives can offer scholars opportunities that can to help inform their careers. The museum is a resource that can be mined over a long period of time, inflecting the trajectory of research. Our University of Exeter colleagues Professor John Plunkett and Professor Joe Kember explore nineteenth century visual culture in distinct but complementary ways; Plunkett as a scholar within English working primarily on nineteenth century visual culture and media, while Kember is a film historian, specialising in early cinema. They have often worked together on projects using items in the museum alongside other collections and resources; such as their AHRC funded project *Moving and Projected-Image Exhibition in the South-West 1820-1914*

<https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/english/research/projects/movingandprojectedimage/>

which mapped the exhibition of visual shows in selected south-west locations between 1820 and 1914. This has resulted several publications, public engagement work and further projects diving deeper into areas represented by the collection (Kember, Plunkett, Sullivan, 2012. Plunkett has particular interests in the peep show

and stereoscope, as well as the parallels between old and new media that fascinated the visiting researchers detailed above. He was also involved in a project with choreographer Lea Anderson, an example of our work with creative practitioners. Anderson spent many hours in the museum researching nineteenth century embodied media and forms of projection used to create fantastical effects and illusions, such as the phantasmagoria and the theatrical trick, Pepper's Ghost. These artefacts in the museum have been used as inspiration to develop a new performance piece called the 'Cabaret of Nothingness'. Reflecting on the process Anderson has said that, 'there is enough inspiration in the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum Collection for a lifetime of performances' (<https://www.artsandcultureexeter.co.uk/news/a-spotlight-on-2019-2020-creative-fellow-lea-anderson>). Kember meanwhile has explored the evidence on the earliest film shows before going back to discover their antecedents, particularly the staging of magic lantern shows (2020). This research has explored how this endeavour was international in scope through projects in Australia, and also across Europe through 'the Million Pictures' project (Kember and Crangle, 2018).

### Traces of Cinemagoing

Dr Lisa Smithstead has worked with the collections through study as an undergraduate and research as a doctoral student through to Senior Lecturer. As a collection that is shaped by the audience's experiences, she has used the museum to explore how the interactions between the audience member and the cinema experience can be glimpsed through the ephemera produced around this relationship. Her ground-breaking book *Off to the Pictures Cinemagoing, Women's Writing and Movie Culture in Interwar Britain* (2016) illustrates this from the stories published exploring the world of the female filmgoer between the wars, the postcards

that commented on cinemagoing as a phenomenon, and also the personal messages that women wrote on the back to their friends and loved ones on the film postcards we hold. As she argues, 'film as a cultural artefact constructed ways of seeing, thinking and feeling, and women's writing about these experiences of film texts, alongside the other artefacts of the film world - fan magazines, reviews, criticism, star-endorsed products or cosmetics - had an impact on the formation of gendered identities in relation to and in dialogue with other kinds of figured worlds in which women were engaged' (2016, p.195). The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum's collection enables this intensity of research across different types of evidence.

Cinemagoing is a productive subject in considering continuities across time, as well as within a specific period, as with Smithstead's research. Wickham has used the example of a programme from the Hyde Park Picture House in Leeds in 1916 to demonstrate how ephemera with a very specific function and purpose – in this case to tell people in Leeds what was screening in a particular week – can prove to be a rich research resource (2010, p.318). The programmes produced by cinemas (predominantly larger or more luxurious venues) in the period between the wars enable us to see how the cinema industry imagined their audience. Frequently the emphasis is placed on the venue over the films that were playing. This can be seen most explicitly in the museum's large collection of opening programmes, produced to mark the construction of new cinemas, predominantly in the expansionist years of the 1920s and 1930s. The opening programme of the Astoria in Brighton in December 1933 is a case in point, a very lavish publication with a beautifully designed cover showing the art deco magnificence of the building dwarfing the royal pavilion (EXEBD 18963). Inside is a foreword by the managing director of the exhibition company, heralding the superior technology and comfort offered by the

Astoria, followed by a great deal of detail on its design and construction, and portraits of the manager and organist. While there is one page on the prestige film that will open the cinema, Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (d. Alexander Korda, 1933), there is much more detail on the experience that will await customers over the content, and this is replicated across similar artefacts in the collection.



Figure 1: EXEBD 18963

There are parallels in the publicity materials produced by contemporary exhibitors. Ephemera from the present is actively collected by the museum to augment the collection because it can offer immediate insights into both changes and continuities in cinema history. In 2015 we acquired a set of promotional postcards produced by the Picturehouse chain to advertise their membership scheme (EXEBD 90340). The eight cards, like the programmes of the inter-war years, advertise the experience that the chain claims to offer as much as the films they show. Each card shows a different member of the public holding up a sign with their feelings about the scheme,

signed with their name and the length of their membership. Testimonies include 'comfy seats, great sound and a great experience. It's the perfect combination', from a young man called Harry, while Dana, an older woman, tells us that 'I sometimes pop in for a drink even when I'm not going to watch a film'. Three of the cards concentrate on the emotions that membership inspires, whether it is Stephanie's practical pleasure in being able to use the membership across different sites or Jennifer and Terry's feelings of inclusion; 'everyone I know is already a member' and 'I quite like being in a club that you want to belong to'. This strategy of identification with a place, or a recognisable replicated experience across different sites, harks back to exhibition practice from the past.

Contemporary items should also be collected because they very quickly gain a historical importance of its own. A very basic listing of films to be shown at the Exeter Picturehouse for the week of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 has taken on significance already because most of the programme was never shown due to the closure of public venues for the first coronavirus lockdown (EXEBD 71872). The lead film that week, *Misbehaviour* (d. Philippa Lowthorpe, 2020), which is featured on the cover, was only able to be screened for a couple of days and was subsequent shown on streaming sites. This simple listing is now a piece of evidence from a phantom past; we now know that the screenings it lists were not able to take place and it highlights how the local can be affected by the global.

Research pathways can be created or altered by the acquisition of both large private collections, and even single items that enter the public sphere by being added to a museum collection. In 2018 we were informed that the artist and photographer

Townly Cooke had bequeathed us his extensive collection of silent film stills and ephemera in his will. He had acquired his collection from various sources over a long period of time, and it was largely previously unseen. As the large number of items are catalogued, they open up the possibility of being used to plot new trails through silent film history in Britain. A set of publicity cards for ten film titles pasted with around half a dozen stills on each side (EXEBD 97156-97165), produced to advertise Cecil Hepworth's titles starring Henry Edwards and Chrissie White, offer an exciting insight into how British producers were trying to promote their films in a period (the late 1910s and early 1920s) when audiences for British titles on British screens were scarce. In addition, some titles are no longer extant and the stills may provide the only visual record remaining. Equally Cooke had managed to source several press books and programmes for British films from Scandinavia, offering new sources for research on British films' distribution abroad in this period.

A donation of a single, or small number of items can also offer the opportunity to consider a new perspective on film history. Scrap books are a growing field of interest from scholars because of the direct voice they give to the audience member who compiled them, who creates something of their own from the sources they consume. However, this study can be frustrating because often this authorship is not clear; a set of scrapbooks on 1920s stars clearly by the same hand in our collection (EXEBD 49173-49184) were acquired by Bill and Peter in second-hand shops and there is nothing to tell us who might have made them. In the autumn of 2021 however, we have just received three scrap books from a pair of sisters in North Devon that were compiled by their mother (EXEBD 97712-97715). We were able to find out from them something about this lady's fascinating life as a local entertainer

and can now see something of the specifics of authorship behind the selection process for the books.

The acquisition of new collections by the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum creates new research routes and paths through the collection, expanding the range of research questions, methods and approaches that are afforded and supported by its holdings. The museum has enabled and fostered new approaches by hosting a number of visiting scholars through its Research Stipend scheme and other doctoral and Early Career Scholars have been able to spend time researching at the museum through funded placements. One such case study is Dr Steven Roberts' work on the newly acquired Pamela Davies' Collection <http://lib-archives.ex.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=BDC+9&pos=1>, which he outlines succinctly in an article for *Alphaville* (2020a).

Pamela Davies (1922-1986) was a continuity supervisor working in the British film industry from 1948-1985, a role often colloquially known as 'script girl', including on titles such as *Richard III* (d. Laurence Olivier, 1955) and *Oliver!* (d. Carol Reed, 1968) Her collection, donated by her sister to the museum in 2017, comprises some six hundred photographs and contact sheets taken on the sets of a wide range of films on which Davies' worked. In some cases these images showed her working on set, while others were artefacts from her day to day work. These images formed an essential reference point for her to use during the production process, permitting her to check and supervise the consistency of camera set ups and the action and delivery of dialogue, to ensure that filming of scenes maintained continuity. Some may have been taken by Davies herself, others by stills photographers, such as Bob



Willoughby, with whom she would have worked closely. The collection is valuable and engaging in a number of ways, and like many of the museum's collections, it can offer many insights depending upon the questions and methods brought to it. At first glance a viewer's eye might be drawn into a privileged view of an 'off duty' moment during a film's production. Some of the photographs capture major stars and film directors between takes and set ups, such as a photograph of Sophia Loren chatting with Davies (EXEBD 71620) during her work on *Judith* (Daniel Mann, 1966), thus the collection can augment the work of researchers in star studies, performance studies and historical production studies

This collection as a whole, however, can also open up bigger questions for film historians. Pamela Davies may not have the name recognition of the directors and stars that she worked with but refocusing analyses of production from the auteurs and talent who are usually given the limelight of the film histories that we already 'know', and taking account of the contribution of workers behind the scenes, and below-the-line, forges new histories, and more widely can rebalance how creative work is understood (Banks, 2009).

The value of rebalancing film histories, to more fully include the work of women in a wide range of production roles has been a powerful and recurrent strand in feminist film history in the last 15 years. The work of the Women's Film and Television History Network, with its biennial conference, and the Women Film Pioneers Project has fostered and encouraged feminist film historians to recover women's screen work in a wide range of production roles through primary research (WHFTN/WFPP, 2021). Of particular relevance to understanding Pamela Davies' career is Melanie Williams' research illuminating the role of the continuity supervisor in the British film industry, which highlights 'the deeply gendered nature of this

section of film production labour,' and Melanie Bell's work on women working below the line in British cinema (M. Williams, 2013 p.604; Bell, 2021).

Williams pinpoints the hitherto elided role of continuity supervision, arguing that despite the fact that continuity has 'absolute centrality to smoothly successful production' and that a critical understanding of it in film studies has been lacking (2013, p.604). Williams rebalances this history, addressing the 'persistent marginalisation' of the role, through her research which vividly captures the pivotal role and duties of the continuity supervisor by synthesising oral history and interview testimony, archived production documents and the 'craft knowledge' which describes the work of continuity in industry manuals (p.604). As Williams reveals, the role of continuity supervisor necessitated a wide range of skills carefully practiced in the socially complex and often highly pressured sphere of film production. Continuity supervision, ensures that the takes 'cut together' requires 'near omniscient levels of vigilance' and extensive note-taking, as well as the practice of diplomacy with director and star if any variation in set ups or dialogue delivery during shooting might jeopardise the continuity at the later editorial stage of production (M. Williams p.608).

Williams' research hence enables Pamela Davies' career to be more fully understood. The Pamela Davies' collection was catalogued by Steven Roberts, as part of an AHRC funded doctoral work placement undertaken as part of his SWWDTP doctoral project (Roberts, 2020b). Building on his close study of the collection in the cataloguing process, Roberts also organised a research symposium 'Working the Script' in March 2019 to foster new approaches to researching how the script has functioned, and continues to function, as a key document in media production.

Roberts was able to bring contextual knowledge to the collection; his doctoral research project on the impacts of widescreen in British cinema allowed him to bring a wider understanding about how Davies adapted her work to the shifting technologies in colour film and widescreen staging (2020b). In his article for *Alphaville*, Roberts situates the collection of photographs in the Pamela Davies' collection in relation to three themes: 'authorship, material format, and special functions' (2020a, p.220). Roberts' attention to these areas greatly helps to 'navigate' the collection, and to bring out traces of Davies' important work. The collection comprises photographs relating to thirty film titles, which 'encompass the popular post-war genres of comedy, crime, science fiction and historical drama, as well as independent cinema directed by Joseph Losey, Laurence Olivier, Carol Reed, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger' (2020a, p.220).

Looking across the range of photographs in the collection, Roberts observes that there are contrasts between the 'mannered style of promotional portraits and "candid" behind-the-scenes reportage' taken by unit still photographers, and the 'annotated photographs indicative of the continuity supervisor's technical expertise' (2020a, p.222). Selecting a case study of Davies' images for several scenes in the Technicolor film *Zarak* (Terence Young, 1956), Roberts carefully analyses how Davies 'adopted a taxonomic vocabulary for colour continuity' in her notes on the reverse of the reference pictures, used for wardrobe and colour continuity. Roberts cites her careful distinctions between shades of a 'chestnut' horse, its 'rose red saddle' and the 'tomato red cotton turban' worn by Larkin (Patrick McGoohan) (p.222). Roberts also analyses how Davies adapted her work to the new challenges and opportunities of 'a widescreen mise en scène which extended the image area and added materially to the complexity of her role' (p.223). Roberts offers Davies'

work on Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* (1955) as evidence. The film was shot in VistaVision, and Davies' role was to 'precisely recorded actor placement' so essential to the 'foregrounded Shakespearean performance' which was a key feature of the production (p.223).

Thus Roberts' work on the Pamela Davies' collection opens up an understanding of her career and craft, as well as underlining 'how continuity supervision and cinema technology coevolved' during the span of her working years (p.224).

Awarding stipends to an international cohort of researchers has allowed new and important questions to be brought to areas of the collection. The research of Indian filmmaker Renu Savant into a series of stereoscope cards featuring 'views of India' and produced by Sunbeam Tours in 1901 demonstrates how early visual culture, produced within a colonial context, can be critically and imaginatively re-mobilised and reviewed. Savant's stipend visit in 2018 allowed her to undertake practice-led research into the stereocard views and other ephemera in the collection referencing India. In her blog post, Savant describes her research process with the stereocards as 'Re-Versing the Journey'; she reflexively situates herself as an ethnographic filmmaker, and characterises her visit to the BDCM as "the performance of... a reverse journey. Completing a full circle of 117 years, when the first stereocards on India were produced by British companies, I was the visited going to the visitor" (2019).

Savant's identification of her practice as ethnographic is a productive and purposeful strategy. She writes:

“Ethnographical filmmaking has its origins in the colonial discourse. As someone who makes films situated in the intersection of cultural research and art practice, I often place myself in the lineage of an ethnographic filmmaker. In part this is performative practice, as though ‘taking on’ the role of a filmmaker, ‘from outside’, researching a culture, while at the same time being placed in a certain power relation with them. Being a woman, allows me to put this role in relief, in that I can never occupy the position of the ‘man with the camera’ and all the social dynamics that engenders. (2019)”

Savant frames her research encounters with the stereocard views as ‘performative’, in the sense that she undertakes an “an ‘act’ of viewing” of the images and their production. This active positioning is a way that Savant “sought to intervene in some of the texts accompanying the stereocards.” And she writes that “Fiction is a strategy to the extent that one can situate oneself in duration in fiction, rather than a particular place or time (2019).”

Her blog account of her research evokes Savant’s acts of viewing a range of subjects in the stereocards. Savant vividly describes her affectual viewing of the images as the first step of ‘re-versal’,

“I put the stereoscope to my eyes, the cold of Exeter seeping through my jeans into my legs. The 3D image refuses to come into focus, I shift my position unconsciously, as if that would shift the image into focus. As I slide into my own memories of sunny Mumbai, of Versova, the people who speak my language while they hang out fish to dry, who dress only slightly differently now, the elusive image from the stereoscope perched on my nose comes to me – I can see it, in 3D! (2019)”

Savant's interventions with the 'scenes' that she views offer important re-animations and revelations about the ways in which the scenes are ideologically structured by the British colonial project. Her active viewing highlights how the composition and disposition of subjects arranges or poses the scene from a historically situated Western perspective. Savant's re-versing the images, for example, in her description of viewing a card in the set showing a postman (EXEBD 62284) her attentive act of viewing includes the bystander in the picture. Sunbeam Tours centres the composition on the delivery of mail from an Indian postman to an English officer, but Savant's analysis decentralises the composition, looking to the background of the frame. She writes:

"... it is the stark curiosity of the bystanders, looking at the photo being taken, often looking straight into the camera [that] creates a strange living alchemy... by not being fixed into a pose, their gaze and their focus on the act of taking the photograph often creates something alive and fluid in the continuing time. It gives rise to the experience of a living duration for me.

In this photo, the woman, who is described [in Sunbeam Tour's accompanying text] as a 'coolie woman' standing half in, half out of the photo, posed straight, rigidly forms this presence. Ignored by the photographer, even as he asks her to stand in the frame, he keeps her out of focus and not very exposed. She remains unclear even when viewed through the stereoscope. I wonder what kinds of fears her enigmatic but rigidly posed presence could have spoken of (2019)."

Through her encounter and questioning of this image, and the strategies of its production, Savant re-verses the composition, and imaginatively re-describes and re-

textualises Sunbeam Tours' description and offers a place and position for this woman's subjectivity within the colonised space of the image.

Stipend holder Dr Nick Jones used his 2018 trip to the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum to extend his research into the spatiality of immersive media by exploring how the 'aesthetics and technologies of today's 3D cinema is greatly enriched by an exploration of [the] earlier media environment' represented by the collections of nineteenth century stereoscopes.

In his account of his research with the rich range of stereoscopic apparatus that the museum holds, Jones advocates practicing a hands-on history, to try to explore some of the experiential features of early visual media. While he acknowledges that historians of visual media have to retain an awareness that 'modes of observation are historically situated', and hence the notion of a total 'reconstruction' or 'reproduction' of the visual sensations of the past is impossible, nevertheless he argues for the value of researching experientially, he writes:

"it is necessary for us to not only explore the theories and cultural contexts of certain media practices, but also to get our hands dirty, engaging in a tactile manner with the devices and practices that would have been everyday objects and undertakings for the Victorian consumer (2018)."

Jones' hands-on research with a range of stereoscopic media allowed him to explore how, in the period between the 1860s and 1910s "stereoscopic aesthetics and practices were... subtly but profoundly varied."

For example, Jones describes how his encounter with the Brewster stereoscope [EXEBD 69040] "offers a powerful impression of tunnel vision", while viewing through the Holmes stereoscope [EXEBD 66435] "accentuate[s] a... blinkered media

experience”, which includes “the presence of the edges of the viewer in one’s peripheral vision”, both of which contrast to his experience of the achromatic stereoscope [EXEBD 48457], the device’s adjustable lens, offers him “a highly defined, sharp visual field (2018).” Jones draws further contrasts between these hand-held devices, and his experience viewing the pedestal stereoscope [EXEBD 69025]. The device can be loaded with a series of stereocards, offering the viewer the ability to “cycle between cards”. Jones’ draws comparisons between this ability to move to a new view, and the affordances of the ‘swipe and renew’ of contemporary devices, such as smart phones and tablets, Jones reflects on the “similarly temporalized immersive experience, one which can be dashed past or lingered over at the viewer’s discretion (2019).” As with others, this research at the museum has help to inform full-length monographs (Jones 2020; De Luca 2021; Ng 2021).

The museum is not just a resource for established researchers; it can be an entry point into thinking about what research can be and how it might work. As such the collection is brought to classes across a range of disciplines from drama to history, from sociology to English and Art History. Students can work with original artefacts and these encounters are rich and productive for them; handling something that someone looked at a century ago gives a frisson of connection to that moment. This can go some way to diminishing the dissonance that hindsight brings to engaging with history. In looking at a fan magazine from 1921 a student can view editorial, articles, illustrations, reader’s letters, advertisements and reviews but also touch the high-quality paper that was used and get some sense of what such an object might have meant to its audience at the time and the ‘structures of feeling’ that underlie all these elements. Inevitably this runs in parallel with the process Raymond Williams



describes whereby 'the new generation', as well as 'taking up many continuities' and 'reproducing many aspects of the organisation' will be 'feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling', determined by their own lives and the discourse that surrounds them (R. Williams 1961/1994 p 61).

As a collection about moving image culture the collection is most frequently and intensely used within modules on the Film and Television Studies programmes. As Exeter has this unique asset then our teaching and study of film (and sometimes television) texts and of the nature of moving images and their audiences, can be informed by the museum's holdings. This begins from the first week of film study at Exeter and threads through their career as they learn how to 'read' material culture and assess it as evidence. For some students this culminates in a third year module, 'British Screens', taught by Wickham and the Head of Film, Professor Linda Ruth Williams. Running for the seventh time in academic year 2021-22, the module looks at the history of moving image culture in Britain through the holdings of the museum. A variety of film and television texts are screened to illustrate the development and also the themes that we believe underpin the production and consumption of moving pictures in Britain. These range from the use of nineteenth century optical media in Bill Douglas's *Comrades* (1987) to TV sitcom episodes, and to questions of identity in Amma Asante's *Belle* (2013). To truly give a picture of what the moving image has meant in Britain this also means showing and discussion films from Hollywood and elsewhere for the impact they have made on how people have experienced screen culture. Within these classes there is an intensive use of museum material to open up this 'lived culture'. For instance, in a week on stars the vast amount of material

that the museum holds on the British consumption of Marilyn Monroe's star persona from both the 1950s and in the years after her death are used in conjunction with items produced about (and in some cases purportedly 'by') Diana Dors, promoted as her home-grown counterpart. By looking through these artefacts, students discover that despite the apparent similarities between the two stars in their appearance and appeal, cultural specificity renders them significantly different in their impact on British audiences. The combination of artefacts and critical writing works well in this regard; looking at Richard Dyer's account of Marilyn Monroe's 'natural' sexuality and its effect on American culture in his study *Heavenly Bodies* (1986) contrasts with students' viewing of Diana Dors' knowing columns in *Picturegoer*, for example (EXEBD 73169), the widely distributed 3-D book of her in suggestive poses (EXEBD 42213) and her early autobiography *Swingin' Dors* (EXEBD 44329), all rooted in the contradictions of Britain on sexuality and femininity in the 1950s. In the same way a look at the debates on what the British film industry and its current failings sees the same arguments being put forward in the editorial pages of the first intellectual film magazine, *Close-Up*, in 1927 (EXEBD 27498) as recur regularly over the next century.

This study culminates in an innovative form of assessment, a collaborative curation assignment, which constitutes 50% of the students' final mark. In groups the students create an exhibition that forms part of the museum's public display for some months afterwards. Each group decides on a theme within the very broad parameters of the moving image in Britain. They then come into the museum, using our catalogue to unearth items that could potentially contribute to the exhibition, appraising them and considering how they might best fit together. The process of putting together and designing the display follows, students learning and

implementing techniques to ensure the exhibition is executed as effectively as possible. The aim is to produce exhibitions that are both intellectually rigorous and attractive to look at for the public visitor. They are presented together in four sections of one large cabinet that dominates the reception area of the building that houses the museum, forming an entrance point into our permanent exhibitions. The standard of exhibitions has always been consistently high, and the best examples have understood that a visual language should be adopted where arguments can be constructed through objects. Meanings arise both from the artefact in itself and its relationship to those around it. In 2018 a group created a dynamic exhibition on the introduction of 3-D to Britain and how it can create new ways of seeing the world for its audience. This was demonstrated by using stereoscopic devices within the case in such a way that visitors could view into them and see their immersive effect. The display ranged from nineteenth century stereoscopes to the 3-D multiplex spectacles of the early 2010s. The following year a group's project on pop music and film in Britain used artefacts to take a longer and broader view than usual of the relationship between the film and music industries from George Formby to *Rocketman* (d. Dexter Fletcher, 2018). In 2021, despite restrictions due to coronavirus, a group comprising just two students curated an excellent display on memory and cinemagoing, inspired by Bill Douglas's autobiographical piece 'Palace of Dreams' (1978). Like the other examples above this made intelligent use both of the unique properties and stories informing the collection and the structure of the display case itself to present ideas and raise questions for the visitor. A successful exhibition is both readily accessible to any passing member of the public but also informed by a deep understanding of the nuances of moving image culture as represented by the items in the museum

and underscored by the critical enquiries that the students have considered through their reading.

Through this exercise the students develop skills beyond the usual essay or exam format. They learn how to understand Film and TV culture through the active role of the audience as consumers and to both appreciate and demonstrate the power and possibilities of the visual and physical material that exists alongside the text and the words that are written about it. As a group exercise with an individual element through the written submissions (a reflective blog and social media posts) that accompany the exhibition they also learn the value of researching and decision-making as a team. The status of the student exhibitions as public displays, forming part of a member of the public's visit to and experience of the museum, shows that researching moving image history is part of an ongoing dialogue with the audience. In addition to the use of the collections in study, there is also a volunteer programme for students in the museum where they contribute to documentation, display and interpretation. Many volunteers have subsequently pursued careers in heritage, developing the skills they learnt in Exeter (Warren, 2017).

The collections at The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum form both a broad and deep account of moving image history. We have seen through these examples of approaches to early optical media, cinema publicity and audience interactions that this can create a long-term research path, in which scholars can develop critical questions using artefacts as evidence. Equally they can inspire researchers to think about their study questions in a new way, shaped by the items that they discover in the collection, or indeed to explore a divergent path from the one they expected.

Such a dialogue in turn signifies the place of moving images and how we might understand them within everyday life. Curation becomes an act of understanding as well as an act of recovery; as Raymond Williams suggests 'establishing new lines with the past, breaking or re-drawing existing lines' (1961/1994 p. 61). By juxtaposing images and objects across a time period (as most of the displays do) new accounts of moving image history can be made by new researchers.

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