



**THE NATION'S RURAL PAST REVEALED
IN BRITAIN ON FILM: RURAL LIFE**



**DISCOVER VANISHED RURAL LIFE ON FILM ACROSS
THE MIDLANDS:**

- **EXPLORE 750 ARCHIVE FILMS WITH RURAL CONTENT UK-WIDE**
 - **DISCOVER BRITAIN'S COUNTRYSIDE FROM 1900 TO 1999**

NEWLY AVAILABLE THROUGH BFI PLAYER

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#BritainOnFilm

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 Tuesday 24 May 2016, London – The BFI today announces **Rural Life**, the release online of **over 750 films** from **1900 to 1999**, many unseen since they were first shown. The films form part of the BFI's **Britain on Film** project, that reveals hidden histories and forgotten stories of people and places from every corner of Great Britain from the UK's key film and TV archives, available for free on **BFI Player** via an interactive map. The archive films will also be visiting over 125 locations around the country for special screenings and events.

Rural Life charts the changing countryside and rural life of the Midlands, highlighting activities, pursuits and traditions still surviving today, as well as customs, trades and skills that have since

dwindled or disappeared. Viewers can enjoy idyllic scenes of Derbyshire village life in the 1930s, learn about one man's life working on the Shropshire Union canal, cheer on the competitors at the World Conker Championships in Northamptonshire and marvel at the tiny Rutland village of Whitwell's bold attempt to 'twin' itself with Paris.

Robin Baker, Head Curator, BFI National Archive said, "*These films offer an unrivalled record of our rural heritage in all its richness across the 20th century. It's an immersive experience to watch them, and often deeply moving. People who live and work in the countryside will be fascinated to see how their forbears used to live. Like many other city dwellers, I was born and bred in the countryside, and this collection of films offers all of us an extraordinary and very real social history of the British countryside. It's a very potent portrait of an often neglected cornerstone of our national life.*"

The films in **Rural Life** date from 1900 to 1999 and are drawn from the collections of the BFI National Archive and the UK's Regional and National Film Archives, with content spanning the whole of the UK. Anyone can explore Britain's rural past through the **Britain on Film** map, which reveals films shot in almost every county. Since **Britain on Film's** launch, over 6 million people have visited the site to discover their country's heritage. With this new collection, there are now over 5,000 films to see online – 97% of which are free. By 2017, thanks to National Lottery funding and the support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, 10,000 film and TV titles from 1895 to the present day will be newly digitised and available to view.

Rural Life presents an illuminating and moving record of Britain's changing countryside and its people, highlighting staple traditions like village pageants, farm shows and harvest festivals, Morris Dancers and Queens of the May. Rural Life also sheds light on local peculiarities such as Somerset's Punky Night lantern procession, Bacup's coconut dance or Ardboe's Wishing Tree. There are fairs, fêtes and festivals as well as countless other seasonal celebrations, while that great British institution, the village pub, features throughout. The gorgeous heritage of rural pursuits is captured in films about sporting events. Hunting (and hunt saboteurs) and horseracing feature alongside newer additions like motocross. Idyllic country holidays are captured in evocative amateur films, while travelogues offer enticing sights to lure more hikers and ramblers. There are also films exploring the varied history of farming and agricultural techniques, from sowing to harvesting. These are films which give a rich historical insight into the way we lived outside of big towns and cities, with landscapes and people who could have walked off the pages of Thomas Hardy, Walter Scott, John Betjeman or Catherine Cookson.

The BFI will also release, on BFI Player as well as DVD and Blu-ray, Peter Hall's unjustly neglected **Akenfield** (1974), which features several Suffolk villages. To mark this release, three special screenings will be held in the woodland 'theatre' on **Jimmy's Farm** near Ipswich on 8, 9 and 10 July 2016 with accompanying BBQ and bar.

MIDLANDS

Highlights in the Midlands archives include:

Kniveton Village and Parishioners (1934): *Filmmaker Wilfred Ratcliffe captures rural life in the village of Kniveton in Derbyshire. It might not be truly candid, its subjects are very aware of the camera, but this time capsule that features the village blacksmith to the horse drawn milk wagon and the gossip around the water pump is a valuable record of pre-war rural life.*

Canal Bargee (1966): Jack Roberts has spent a life on the canals of Britain - born on a canal boat in 1894, he spent a lifetime working on the cut and was one of the final canal bargees using a horse. From Norbury Junction in Staffordshire Jack Roberts travels along the Shropshire Union canal and remembers the days of the fly-boats, the high speed canal system that tried to compete with rail and road.

Whitwell Twinned with Paris (1980): The then recently opened Rutland Water could never be compared to the magnificent River Seine and its population is hardly on a par with the great French city but ambitious Whitwell village in Rutland has still gone ahead and twinned itself with Paris. With all the clichés of France on show from the Citroen car, onions, to Can-Can girls and some dodgy accents this 'twinning' appears to be a product of the saloon bar rather than the international diplomacy table.

Coles: Jenny's Farm at Ilam, Derbyshire (1941): The Coles family enjoy life on the farm at Ilam in Derbyshire and Flintham in Nottinghamshire. It's 1941 and momentous events are occurring around the world but life continues uninterrupted in rural Britain.

Conkers (1981): Self-proclaimed 'Conker King', Vic Owen, has to wear a new string of conkers around his neck every year the World Championships are held at Aston in East Northamptonshire. As they've been running the event since 1965 that honour must be starting to weigh quite heavy. This film shows us the 1981 event. The World Conker Championships were held in the village of Aston in East Northamptonshire from 1965 until 2010 and now take place in the nearby village of Southwick.

BFI DVD RELEASES

- **Sir Peter Hall's *Akenfield* (1974)** features a cast of non-professional actors drawn from the communities of several Suffolk villages and traces three generations of one Suffolk family and their lives in the farming industry. Loosely based on Ronald Blythe's acclaimed book *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*, the film offers an authentic depiction of country life over the changing seasons.

The film will be released on DVD and Blu-ray in a Dual Format Edition on 18 July 2016, followed by a screening at BFI Southbank on Wednesday 20 July with an on-stage panel discussion afterwards. Three special screenings will be held at Jimmy's Farm near Ipswich on 8, 9 and 10 July 2016 in the woodland 'theatre' with accompanying BBQ and bar.

- **Pat O'Connor's *A Month in the Country* (1987)** adapted from J L Carr's novel is set during a 1920s summer in rural Yorkshire. Tom Birkin (Colin Firth, in his first lead role), a destitute World War I veteran coming to terms with the after-effects of the war, has been employed by a village church to carry out restoration work on a medieval mural and forms a close friendship with fellow veteran James Moon (Kenneth Branagh). *A Month in the Country* will be released on DVD and Blu-ray in a Dual Format Edition on **20 June 2016**.
- **Andrew Grieve's *On the Black Hill* (1987)** is based on Bruce Chatwin's award-winning novel and depicts the life of a rural farming family set in the beautiful Welsh Border country.

Starring Bob Peck (*Jurassic Park*) and Gemma Jones (*Bridget Jones's Diary*) and will be released on DVD on **22 August 2016**

UK-WIDE ACTIVITY

The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) will be staging over 160 screening events in 129 locations. Full details and how to book these events can be found at www.britainonfilmscreenings.org.uk

THE MIDLANDS

- **CENTRAL SHORTS, Central England Counties:** New short compilations of Britain on Film: Rural Life archive will screen before feature films in venues across Central England in the counties of Nottingham, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

ABOUT BRITAIN ON FILM AND UNLOCKING FILM HERITAGE

Britain on Film is one of the largest and most complex archival projects ever undertaken and is part of the BFI's Unlocking Film Heritage programme (2013-17). Unlocking film heritage for everyone in the UK to enjoy is a key strategic priority for the BFI, and Britain on Film is the public launch of a vast programme of work, which has been ongoing for over three years. Bringing together a partnership with Regional and National Film Archives and rights holder collections across the UK, this work has included a sophisticated programme of data capture, cataloguing, copying to archival standards, meticulous preservation of original materials, thorough searching of archives across the country, new state-of-the-art equipment and digital storage facilities and the transfer of films to the BFI's online video platform, BFI Player.

Unlocking Film Heritage and Britain on Film are thanks to £15 million funding from the National Lottery and the additional support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

- ENDS -

Press contacts

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Film and TV titles and the Britain on Film trailer can be viewed and downloaded via Panther – for access please contact Caroline.jones@bfi.org.uk

Images are available via –

www.image.net/britain_on_film/2016/Rural_Life

Britain on Film online elsewhere

- Selections from Britain On Film will also be hosted on the BFI's YouTube channel, Facebook and Twitter, so audiences can find and experience it in the easiest way possible

- BFI and regional and national film archive curators will be writing features highlighting important films and themes on the BFI website. Their expertise will add context and provide new ways in for the British public to find films that illuminate the places they know and love
- Join the conversation at **#BritainOnFilm**

Britain on Film is a project from the BFI National Archive and the UK's Regional and National Film Archives

About the Regional and National Film Archives

The English Regional Film Archives and other National Film Archives (listed below) hold significant collections of film and video material specifically relevant to their regions or hold dedicated collections such as Imperial War Museums, preserved in specialised storage facilities and made widely available for education, research, communities and the wider public.

East Anglian Film Archive

Imperial War Museums

London's Screen Archives

Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln

North East Film Archive

North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University

Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive

Scottish Screen Archive

Screen Archive South East

South West Film & Television Archive

National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales

Wessex Film and Sound Archive

Yorkshire Film Archive

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 the Media Archive for Central England (MACE)

The Media Archive for Central England (MACE), which is based at the University of Lincoln, is the screen archive for the Midlands in the UK. It seeks to preserve the moving images of the East and West Midlands and provide affordable public access to this material. The area stretches from the fens around the Wash, north to the Lincolnshire Wolds, west across the Derbyshire Peak to the Marches and back across the shire counties of Warwick, Leicester and Northampton and encompasses the country's industrial heartland. Our unique and accessible collections are constantly being developed to reflect the places, history, people and culture of this diverse swathe of England.

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 Britain on Film collections are accessible through the BFI Player.

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film>

About the BFI Film Audience Network

The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) is a ground-breaking initiative that gives audiences across the UK the opportunity to see a diverse range of films in a cinema setting. For filmmakers, getting films onto cinema screens is a highly competitive business, particularly for specialised films which includes archive, documentary, independent and foreign language films. The BFI FAN aims to change this.

- With £8.7 million of Lottery funding over four years (2013-2017) BFI has set up partnerships with nine lead organisations (Film Hubs) to work full-time with cinema exhibitors, film festivals, educators, film societies, community venues, film archives and other organisations in their regions or nations to boost audiences for film across the UK.
- The Film Hubs, which drive audience engagement locally, work together with the BFI at a UK-wide level to grow audiences for British independent and specialised film. They currently comprise: Broadway, Nottingham and Cambridge Film Trust; Chapter, Cardiff; HOME, Manchester; Film London; Queen's Film Theatre, Belfast; Regional Screen Scotland; the University of Brighton;

Showroom Sheffield and National Media Museum, Bradford; and Watershed, Bristol. These organisations and their partners form the BFI FAN.

- The Film Hub for Central East (Cambridge Film Trust & Broadway Cinema, Nottingham) has secured funding as part of the BFI's Programming Development Fund to administer and coordinate more than 80 screening events across all UK Film Hubs including film from the regional archives to engage with a wider audience in a number of venues.



About the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation aims to improve the quality of life for people and communities throughout the UK both now and in the future. We do this by funding the charitable work of organisations with the ideas and ability to achieve positive change. We are happy to be supporting Britain on Film – a significant, UK-wide film archive project, which will make titles from the BFI National Archive and national and regional screen archives available to the British public, offering a unique opportunity for insight and reflection on places, communities and histories throughout the UK.

The Foundation is one of the largest independent grant-makers in the UK. We make grants of £30 - £35 million annually towards a wide range of work within the arts, children and young people, the environment and social change. We also operate a £26 million Finance Fund which invests in organisations that aim to deliver both a financial return and a social benefit.

www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk

