



The nature of the Pathe Archive and issues of values **Last Updated January 2004**

The British Pathe Archive is what is says on the tin – an archive. It is not a set of pre-selected curriculum resources.

This key fact needs to be understood by RBCs, LEAs, Schools and Learning Centres. Children, students, teachers and assistants will need to have an understanding of the range of resources within the archive and the options they have for accessing and using them. Some resources could upset a user on grounds of violence or political/social/religious correctness; some resources are duplicated and incomplete; and some things you look for won't be there.

Like any library, museum or new environment children will gain and be protected by being accompanied or guided by friends and adults - without taking away their right to explore for themselves. The type, point and timing of any intervention to children's exploration and uses of learning resources is the art of parenthood, guardianship, friendship and teaching. It draws on and is guided contexts and values as rich and complex as those that produced the British Pathe Archive.

Raw and Cooked

The British Pathe Archive can be considered in terms of:

The RAW - materials that will require selection and preparation and are open to finding unsuitable and non-relevant items

The PRE-PREPARED – materials that have been selected by the teachers for pupils to investigate

The COOKED – materials selected and set into a specific learning programme.

Scale of the Archive

The British Pathe Archive is a huge collection of film records providing its users with a rich and diverse resource. Amongst its 3,500 hours of film the British Pathe Archive contains 81,000 news items and 20,000,000 still images. The archive covers 75 years from the birth of film in 1896 until 1970.

What's an Archive?

The word "Archive" comes from the Ancient Greek word *arkheion* meaning "public office" which in turn derives from the root *arkhe* meaning "government". Someone who works in an archive is called an "Archivist".

British Pathe is the world's first large scale media archive that is fully available to the public. The job of the British Pathe Archive is to preserve, store, catalogue, label (tag) and make available every frame of Pathe footage that exists and its supporting facts. The digitisation process has helped to preserve the resources and made access to and distribution of them for research, learning and commercial use much easier; it also generates income to enable the archive to be sustained and developed.

Types of resources

Items run from a few seconds long to over 8 minutes and in many cases a single title will include several usually unrelated stories. Items from before 1932 will be silent (unless they are documentaries made after the event).

As well as hours of high-quality complete film stories in the newsreels and magazine reels the archive contains:



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- Many items from the early days that are ‘mute’ (silent)
- Titles and Intertitles. Intertitles were used in silent film to explain sequences, support the narrative or record speech.
- Some items, usually older ones, that are faded, scratched and hard to see.
- A number where titles and additional information are lacking
- Items that are out-takes or additional footage for published items
- Reels made as specials – e.g. ‘Review of the year’ or compilations of a period
- Series such as ‘Eve’s’ or the ‘Football Teams Training’ series that ran over several years.
- Film from stock sources was sometimes used e.g. CU of famous political or military people would be edited into fresh footage in Second WW materials. Also during the war the newsreels shared footage (called ‘pooled’ film).
- Documentary and news film made by other agencies
- Specially prepared documentary films
- Stills – literally every still from every film is available as a digitally remastered file. Frames are the small pictures on a piece of film and usually 25 are shown for each second of film seen. The archive holds in excess of 20, million still images.

Searching the Archive

The very scale and range of the archive raises issues about how to locate and choose materials. Searches are enabled through keyword searches and advanced searches using dates and categories of films.

Do the children need an open or closed search?

Note the keyword search in the archive finds matches in the text descriptions that are with each reel. In many instances it is necessary to think around the initial keyword – knowing about the subject helps. There is an advanced search feature that can help identify themes, types of newsreel or date periods.

Issues

Within this vast and various archive covering 75 years from the birth of film in 1896 until the 1970 it is not surprising that there are some stories and images which could upset or be inappropriate to show to some people. Representations of politics, race and social issues are embedded in the newsreels which are very clearly the outcome of editorial and commercial policies and reflect the contexts of the period in which they were produced and issued. It is worth remembering that the newsreels were shown in public cinemas to a huge and wide-ranging audience and the period of British Pathe newsreels, 1895 – 1970, covers at least 6 distinct periods of British History, recording many defining changes in social attitudes and beliefs. Issues of race, gender, class, politics and humanity will, and should, arise.

During the First World War the British Government (similar situations in France and Germany) developed strict rules for what photographs or film could be shown and who could take them and under what conditions. The London Press Bureau issued D notices regulating the actions of the press. In this situation what was shown in the newsreels can be seen as poor reporting in as much as the whole reality is not present - or it can be seen as good reporting, because at least some of the news got through the restrictive regulations. In this situation is ‘no news’ better than some news? The controls on reporting during the Falklands War 50 years later were even more precise.


What can sometime be seen as a drawback in the archive itself can, in use, become one of its primary values – to help people understand how life and ideas have changed and to develop ways of negotiating complex and sometimes conflicting evidence. Communications are a part of life,



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not just a record of it. Users require an understanding of the historical nature of the resource and young users need to be guided towards an understanding - context confers meaning, not content.

Images of War

 The archive contains filmed records of war and its aftermath throughout its history. Some newsreels contain sequences and images of violence, suffering and death, which may not be appropriate viewing for children. Even today, after 35 years of further media coverage of famine and war the recordings made by Pathe cameramen during, for instance, the First World War, or in the concentration camps at the end of the Second World War, are still shocking. It is worth noting that there is also footage from many other wars; e.g. the Sino-Japanese; Spain; Middle East; South America, etc. that a teacher may wish to scrutinize prior to classroom use.

Examples

 **CONCENTRATION CAMP FOOTAGE** 1945. 2837.04

“Disturbing footage of liberation of concentration camp - shocking images of dead bodies and survivors.”

Looking at this newsreel how far into the sequence of shots would you draw the line? And for whom?

 **GERMAN ATROCITIES** 1945. 2837.02

“Disturbing footage of a concentration camp - shocking images of the piles of belongings of the dead.” This example has no dead bodies but shows piles of clothes and shoes – belongings that no longer belong. The title also “anchors” the recorded images to a particular viewpoint before they are seen.

The example of the images of the concentration camp opens a wider debate about how any of us respond to such images. This issue has been explored by Susan Sontag in a recently published book ‘Regarding the Pain of Others’. (Hamish Hamilton, £12.99 ISBN 0-241-14207-5)

In a time when data-protection is high profile what protection do the victims in such images have? What is the role of the camera-operator? (*see Manic Street Preacher’s track about photographer ‘Kevin Carter’.*) What responsibility does the viewer have?