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| Institution: DURHAM UNIVERSITY |
| Unit of Assessment: 30 (HISTORY) |
| Title of case study: The Grierson Trust and British Documentary Film (CS2) |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Jo Fox's research on the British Documentary Film Movement has benefited:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) the Grierson Trust, by enabling its members to contextualise the Movement's purpose and, through them, assisting film-makers to have better understandings of the documentary form and its heritage; (2) nominated and award-winning film-makers, by promoting their work to an international audience and to the film and television industries; (3) Lambent Productions, by profile-raising and assisting it to secure further contracts with the BBC and other television stations; (4) the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, by promoting the significance of Film Australia collections to wider audiences. |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Documentary film became a recognised medium in the United Kingdom during the 1930s through the work of the British Documentary Film Movement, led by John Grierson, widely recognised as the 'Father of Documentary'. The Movement's work defined the genre and its social purpose, and formed its stylistic attributes. The Movement also contributed to the visualisation of British national identity during the 1930s and 1940s, and was formative for the establishment of documentary film and television. Accordingly, the Movement has considerable interest for contemporary film-makers seeking better understandings of the documentary form, and for a general public which is appreciative of its iconic images of interwar Britain, the Second World War and the post-war world.</p> <p>Fox's research has analysed the nature of international documentary networks and relationships between film-makers during the Second World War (2005), assessed the Movement's contribution to the war effort and to the promotion of liberal democracy (2007), explored its transition to television (2013a), and contributed to the understanding of female employment patterns in creative industries during the 1930s and 1940s through a study of women's role in the Movement (2013b). Its findings are underpinned by a much deeper exploration within and across archives than previous studies, using a wider range of collections in Britain, Canada and Australia. While conscious of the Movement's own attempt to 'mythologise' its work and mission, Fox argues that its influence remains formative. Contrary to interpretations that suggest the Movement's influence waned after 1945, she argues that television documentary from the 1950s to the present was its most profound legacy (2013a). She identifies the Movement as a fluid and complex creative collective (2013b), and uses historical evidence to contextualise the Movement's understanding of its purpose and its own sense of being engaged in the social, political and cultural world. A fellowship at the Australian National University's interdisciplinary Humanities Research Centre allowed Fox to explore the international reach of the Documentary Film Movement by mapping work carried out by its members across the Pacific Rim. This process included the formation of a national film unit (later Film Australia), led by Stanley Hawes who worked with Grierson in the UK during the 1930s. The Movement's film work and its members' prolific writings enabled Fox to articulate its significance for broader historical issues. In her 2007 book, Grierson's writings are used to uncover the complicated relationship between propaganda and liberal democracy during the Second World War. Her 2013 article on women documentarists challenges the standard narrative of female employment from the 1930s to the 1950s, and instead uses oral histories to reveal the ways in which female documentarists' recollections owed more to their reaction to second-wave feminism than to the experience of the war itself.</p> <p>Fox carried out this research between 2004 and 2013, while a senior lecturer and then professor at Durham University. The research for the two publications in 2013 was made available before publication in a dialogue with the beneficiaries identified below in order to inform the activities described in section 4.</p> |

3. References to the research

1. (2005) 'John Grierson, his "documentary boys" and the British Ministry of Information, 1939–1942', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25, pp. 345–369 (doi: 10.1080/01439680500236151)
2. (2007) *Film propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II cinema*, Berg, 358 pp. (ISBN 978-1-85973-891-7)
3. (2013a) 'From documentary film to television documentaries: John Grierson and *This Wonderful World*', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10, pp. 498–523 (doi: 10.3366/jbctv.2013.0152)
4. (2013b) 'To be a woman: women in documentary film production, 1929–50', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10, pp. 584–602 (doi: 10.3366/jbctv.2013.0159)

The monograph was peer-reviewed and published by a highly respected Anglo-German academic publishing house. The three articles appeared in leading peer-reviewed journals. Items 1 and 2 were funded by a British Academy grant. Items 3 and 4 have been submitted in REF2.

4. Details of the impactWork with the Grierson Trust

Recognising the strength of her archival research, in 2008 the Board of the Grierson Trust invited Fox to assist in its task of 'changing and updating [its] activities'. This included using research into Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement to reinvigorate the relationship between academe and the film and television industries [1]. The Grierson Trust is a registered charity that exists to promote documentary film-making. Established by members of the Documentary Film Movement following Grierson's death in 1972, it mentors aspiring documentary film-makers and runs educational programmes in primary and secondary schools. It is responsible for annual awards – the Grierson Awards for Documentary Film Production – which recognise and celebrate documentaries from across the world that have made a significant contribution to the genre, and that demonstrate quality, integrity, creativity, originality and overall excellence. The awards represent the 'gold standard' in documentary film production and 'carry a high level of international recognition' [1].

As the Trust considered that Fox's research was 'accessible, grounded, informative' [1], it invited her to provide a three-page historical essay for the 2008 awards-ceremony booklet, explaining Grierson's influence on contemporary documentary production and how the Movement's social purpose has continued to influence today's practitioners. The essay led to an invitation to become a judge for the 2010 awards. Fox was one of two academics among a judging team of seventy (divided into 9 specialist sub-panels). Judges were drawn primarily from the film and television industries. Fox joined the panel for best historical documentary, alongside the author and film-maker Henry Chancellor, Anna Keay, the Properties Presentation Director for English Heritage, and Asha Oberoi, the Managing Director of ITN Source. She used her understanding of the purpose and form of British Documentary in order to guide her judgements and inform the discussion of the panel. Fox's work for the Trust, in the words of its former Chairman, 'remind[ed] current film-makers of the way this legacy still affects the essence of their work and the evolution of the documentary form'. The nominees for, and winners of, the awards benefitted from this recognition by the Trust and their peers, leading to production commissions and a raised profile in a competitive industry. Fox also advised the Trust on public and professional enquires, particularly from production companies to clear image rights, for information on film rights and to obtain archival documents relating to Grierson [3].

Production of the TV documentary *Britain Through a Lens: The British Documentary Film Mob*

Following Fox's work as a judge in 2010, the Vice-Chair of the Trust asked her to participate in the making of a documentary, *Britain Through a Lens: The British Documentary Film Mob*, commissioned by the BBC. This work directly benefited the production company, Lambent Productions, and the Emmy award-winning director of the film. As a contemporary documentarist, the director wanted to understand the historical underpinnings of his profession and art form. As described by the BBC, the film 'assembles a collection of captivating film portraits of Britain, during the economic crisis of the 1930s and the Second World War. Featuring classic documentaries

about slums and coal mines, about potters and posties, about the bombers and the Blitz, the programme reveals the fascinating story of what was also going on behind the camera, of how the documentary was born and became part of British culture'

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b012p53d>). Fox advised the director from September 2010 to July 2011. Her research findings (published 2005–13) informed the shape and historical content of the programme. She assisted the director in setting the intellectual framework, and provided research and documents to inform the script. She offered advice and information to the research team, worked on the script itself and was the credited Historical Consultant. As the director explains: 'The intention from the start was to make a lively programme but with its insights all based on historical research. [This] was where Jo Fox proved indispensable.' Her research makes full use of oral testimonies and contemporary letters that she discovered in British, Canadian and Australian archives, and these became 'an important storytelling device' in the film, introducing materials that were new even to specialist audiences. The director confirms that 'it was her overall broad understanding of this story and how it fitted into a wider history that helped give this documentary depth and weight' [4]. The film was screened on five separate occasions on BBC4 during its initial run, reaching 426,300 viewers. It has subsequently been repeated on BBC4 and on the BBC's I-player in July 2013. It was well received by critics and was twice singled out as *The Independent's* 'Pick of the Day'. It has also been viewed on 8,098 occasions on YouTube [5, 6].

The film received its premiere at the National Film Theatre on London's South Bank. It was the subject of a discussion by leading practitioners, the BFI National Archive Non-Fiction Curator, and the Executive Producer of Channel 4's 'Cutting Edge' programmes. The discussants stated that the programme introduced the Movement to a new generation, and practitioners confirmed that the film brought a realisation of the Movement's influence on their own practice and on contemporary documentary film-making. The audience for the premiere largely comprised members of Britain's documentary film-making community, 'who really got stuck into the questions the film raised about the origins of this craft' [7]. While this was a national event, the programme has also been used by local film societies: it has been screened, for example, at the Picture House in Cambridge, as part of a tribute to the Documentary Film Movement.

The film has particularly benefitted Lambent Productions, its production company. It enabled the development of a creative partnership between the film's director and the company, and assisted Lambent to obtain a longer-term relationship with the BBC, allowing it to break into factual programming, an area of strategic importance for the growth of the company. *The Documentary Film Mob* was Lambent's first archive-based history documentary film and its first commissioned film for BBC4. Based on this experience, Lambent has subsequently worked with the director on *Secret History of Rubbish*, another specialist, factual archive programme in two parts for BBC4. This film, the Company Director and Executive Producer explains, would not have been possible 'had the *Documentary Film Mob* not happened' and had it not been a high-quality production. In addition, Lambent Productions have now 'pitched' ideas to the History Channel and Channel 4 as a result of the 'critical success' of the *Documentary Film Mob*. It was a film that 'resonated' with programme controllers and, as such, the Company Director concludes, 'it is absolutely true to say that it's been very beneficial to us as a company to make that film both in terms of our business and our creativity and it's really exciting to be going into new territory and talking to new commissioning editors on the back of it' [8].

Promoting understanding of the British Documentary Film Movement to international audiences

Fox has also assisted the Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) and Lumiere Productions, based in New York. She acted as a consultant for two programmes for the CBC series *Love, Hate and Propaganda*, one of which focused on Grierson's work at the National Film Board of Canada during the Second World War. She provided research and archival materials and advice that informed the script, as well as appearing as an expert on the programme and its associated web materials (<http://www.cbc.ca/documentaries/lovehatepropaganda/experts.html>). She appeared as an expert commentator and provided research materials on Grierson to the director of Lumiere Productions' six-part documentary *To Tell The Truth* for PBS in the United States. This series premiered at the DOC NYC festival in New York in November 2012: see http://www.lumiereproductions.com/films.php?section=in_progress].

The international impact of Fox's research is further demonstrated by her work with the National Film and Sound Archive in Australia (NFSA) in 2012. While on a fellowship at the Australian

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National University in Canberra, Fox collaborated with the archive to raise awareness of its Film Australia Collections. Film Australia was formed from an Australian government film unit, led by Stanley Hawes, a member of the British Documentary Film Movement. NFSA archivists had been concerned about the lack of attention given to their Film Australia collections. While researching in their archives, Fox worked with curators to arrange a public screening of Hawes' 1954 film *The Queen in Australia* to coincide with the Queen's state visit in 2012. Fox gave a public lecture on the importance of the NFSA collections in this area and helped to publicise them further through a newsletter item on its website (<http://www.nfsa.gov.au/community/newsletters/articles/2011/october/queen-australia/>). She gave a public lecture at ANU on international documentary networks. These events attracted attention from Channel 9 News and ABC national radio. This led to a heightened profile for these neglected collections [9].

The impacts of Fox's research have been on (1) the Grierson Trust, helping to reinvigorate its work by re-establishing the importance of the Documentary Film Movement for contemporary practice; (2) the creation of the television programme *The Documentary Film Mob*, which has ignited debate among practitioners about the purpose of documentary in the 21st century, and which has enabled its makers, Lambent Productions, to break into new fields, helping the company to grow; (3) the international promotion of the Documentary Film Movement to wider audiences and greater use of the materials they left behind.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [1] Statement from and interview with the Chairman of the Grierson Trust at the time of the claimed impact
- [2] Copy of Grierson Awards booklet (2008)
- [3] Correspondence from the General Manager at the Grierson Trust
- [4] Email correspondence relating to *The Documentary Film Mob*, production notes, copy of the film and statement from the Director
- [5] Reviews of *The Documentary Film Mob* in *The Arts Desk* (20 July 2011), *The Independent* (20 July 2011), and *The Independent* (24 July 2011)
- [6] Viewing figures for web and television distribution for *The Documentary Film Mob*
- [7] Statement of impact upon practitioners generated at the premiere of the film:
<http://www.bfi.org.uk/live/video/675>
- [8] Statement from and interview with Company Director and Executive Producer at Lambent Productions
- [9] National Film and Sound Archive (Canberra) newsletter:
<http://www.nfsa.gov.au/community/newsletters/articles/2011/october/queen-australia/>