

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Cambridge</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA30</p>
<p>Title of case study: The GPO Film Unit</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>A research project on the General Post Office Film Unit culminated in a series of film screenings, DVD releases, talks and events. It resulted in the work of the Film Unit being added to the UNESCO UK Memory of the World register and the BT Heritage telecommunications collections being awarded Designated status by the Arts Council.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Scott Anthony has been employed by the University of Cambridge since October 2010 as a postdoctoral fellow. During this period he worked with the British Film Institute on a number of overlapping projects designed to restore, reassess and re-present the work of the GPO Film Unit, the pioneer of documentary film-making which has had an international reputation and legacy.</p> <p>To date the work of the GPO Film Unit has tended to be framed by the concerns of film scholars and discussed in relation to ‘realism’, ideology and politics. This research project began the process of rethinking the work of the GPO Film Unit in terms of the history of science and technology (with the GPO being the biggest employer of scientists in the inter-war period), the history of design and the history of telecommunications media.</p> <p>As well as rethinking understandings of the GPO Film Unit, a crucial constituent part of the research was rethinking how to approach the work of the the GPO Film Unit. In particular, the Film Unit was situated into the aesthetics and iconography of a wider, national, popular material culture of telecommunications. Thus, for example, Anthony led an AHRC-funded series of ‘LitSciMed’ workshops at the Science Museum in 2011 (and contributed to further workshops organised by the Science Museum in 2012/3 and the V&A in 2013) which were used to orientate the project towards a different range of sub disciplines (from historians of empire, to sports historians via scholars of business, design and the history of science and technology) as well as film restorers, poster collectors and antiquarians.</p> <p>In addition to generating new insights into the work of the GPO Film Unit and its place in the wider cultural, social and political history of Britain and the world, for example by recognising that the unit’s work might be better understood in terms of a wider material culture rather than simply ‘film’, these events also provided a common ground on which the previously disparate nature of the collections dealing with the GPO Film Unit could begin to be pooled. One outcome of the research was a book (published in hardback and paperback) that mixed short essays by scholars from a diverse variety of fields, alongside never previously published posters, artworks, sketches, and personal material drawn from the archives of the BFI, the British Postal Museum and Archive and BT Heritage. A special issue of the OUP journal <i>Twentieth Century British History</i> was another important scholarly output.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Scott Anthony, <i>Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession</i> (Manchester University Press, 2012) (265 pages)</p> <p>Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell (eds.), <i>The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit</i> (BFI, 2012) (352 pages)</p> <p>Special issue of the OUP journal <i>Twentieth Century British History</i>, including Scott Anthony and James G. Mansell, ‘Introduction: The Documentary Film Movement and the Spaces of British</p>

Identity', *TCBH*, March 2012, 23 (1), pp.1-11

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Anthony's collaboration with the British Film Institute, BT Heritage, and the British Postal Museum and Archive in publicizing and historicizing the work of the GPO Film Unit dates back to his doctoral research on Stephen Tallents. During the subsequent period when he was working in temporary teaching positions and as a journalist, he developed close relationships with these and other bodies devoted to preserving historic British documentary film, which allowed him to feed his research into a wide range of public-access and public-education activities. For example, to mark the restoration of several key films, including *Night Mail* (which was released alongside a short mass-market monograph which Anthony co-authored), the BFI organised screenings at the Southbank, as well as a programme of films that toured cinemas throughout the UK, the release of three DVD boxsets, the online curation of several key films and a number of educational resources, such as an short interactive educational film starring Sir Derek Jacobi, which was an Honoree in the 'Best Use of Interactive Film and Video' category at the 2009 Webbys..

Research insights developed by the project were disseminated in introductory talks and debates by touring academics and archivists as part of the *Love Letters & Live Wires* programme of historic GPO films that toured UK cinemas. To date the programme has screened at approximately 75 cinemas nationwide since and grossed approximately £17,500 with 4,000 admissions. The insights and debates generated by the *Love Letters* tour informed a series of introductory notes and essays included in the British Film Institute's release of three well-reviewed DVD boxsets: *Addressing the Nation: The GPO Film Unit Collection Volume 1*, *We Live in Two Worlds: The GPO Film Unit Collection Volume 2* and *If War Should Come: The GPO Film Unit Collection Volume 3*. *We Live in Two Worlds*, volume two of the BFI's GPO Film Unit collection, won 'DVD of the year' at the 2009 Il Cinema Ritrovato awards at Bologna Film Festival. These releases led to the production of a final wave of four DVDs released in 2011-13, enriched by the later stages of the research on the visual contexts for the GPO's documentary work, which emphasised the importance of these alternative contexts to understanding the films – for example, the 'From Turksib to Night Mail' DVD (2011) included an advert made by the Empire Marketing Board, as well as a 'poster film' and science education films. This package of films was accompanied by essays and other material which drew on research undertaken at Cambridge. The combined 'over the counter' recorded UK sales of these DVDs as collated by the Official Charts Company is around 30,000 copies (5g).

In addition to this, the British Postal Museum and Archive have directly sold a further 1,437 DVDs and have included the research project in its 2011 'impact' report on the grounds that: a) the income received from royalties from the BFI on the sale of the DVDs has provided a significant income stream; b) the project had represented a major contribution to two of the BPMA's key aims, accessibility and sustainability; c) the research has improved curators' knowledge of the scope and significance of their own collections (5h).

The award of a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship that brought Anthony to Cambridge in 2010 allowed him to bring his work to fruition in the publication of the monograph on Tallents and especially the research and publication of his co-edited history of the GPO Film Unit, both in 2012. These publications drew on his established relationships with the BFI, BT Heritage and the BPMA, and also further developed those relationships, as evident in the latest DVD releases by BFI and the recent work with curators at the BPMA. But the most significant outcomes of Anthony's research while at Cambridge, and of his work with BFI and BT in this period, have been his contributions to two landmark national and international recognitions of the work of the GPO Film Unit in 2011 and 2012.

The first and most significant impact of this research was that in 2011 the work of the GPO Film Unit was added to UNESCO's UK Memory of the World register, part of a UNESCO programme to support and raise awareness of archives (currently limited to 30 items and collections on the UK register). This achievement was widely reported in the international media (including *The*

Hollywood Reporter). Making use of the insights and ideas developed in the wider programme of cultural and scholarly activity, Anthony co-authored with BT Heritage's archivist the application to have the films added to the Register, which was submitted by BT Heritage **(5a)**.

Second, at the national level, in 2012 BT Heritage won Designated status from the Arts Council in recognition of their collections' vital, but little understood, record of the prominent role that the UK has played in communications technology from its very beginning, and the profound impact this has had on people's lives around the world. The improvements to BT Heritage's collection, and its increased visibility, were heavily supported by scholarly research on the GPO Film Unit. Using knowledge generated during his scholarly research, Anthony wrote a reference for BT Heritage's successful bid to win Designated status **(5b)**.

A third outcome is that, in anticipation of the creation of a new Postal Museum, Anthony co-ran workshops (with DreamWorks Studios) for the BPMA at Central St Martins. These workshops have resulted in a series of new animated shorts that responded both to the historic films, posters and artworks but also new interpretations of them. The best of the resulting films are to be screened at festivals, on the internet and installed on terminals in the new museum.

One of the scholarly research outputs, the edited volume *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit*, was released in paperback and has been favourably reviewed in influential non-scholarly forums such as the TLS, Sight & Sound magazine and by the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC). The book's release was also covered on the BBC News and in The Guardian newspaper **(5c, 5d, 5e, 5f)**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a. Work of the GPO Film Unit added to UNESCO's Memory of the World register: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/british-film-institute-archive-collections-191529>; Anthony's role can be confirmed by person 1 (Head of Heritage, BT) (email provided).
- b. BT Heritage collection wins Arts Council 'Designated' status: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/arts-council-news/designated-status-awarded-collections-bt-archives-/>; Anthony's role can be confirmed by person 1 (email provided).
- c. TLS Review: http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/multimedia/archive/00245/Contents_08_02_12_245793a.pdf (Review by Peter Collard, 8 February 2012)
- d. Sight & Sound review in February 2012 issue, p.92
BUFVC review: <http://bufvc.ac.uk/reviews/the-projection-of-britain>
- e. The Guardian: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/nov/10/gpo-films-pioneers-study>
- f. BBC News: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-15655312>
- g. Cinema audiences and DVD sales figures can be confirmed by person 2 (Operations Co-ordinator, BFI) (email provided).
- h. British Postal Museum and Archive, Impact Report, 2011, and contribution of the research can be confirmed by person 3 (Enterprise & Licensing Officer, BPMA) (email provided).