

British Silent Film Festival Symposium 2026 Programme



Friday 10th April 2026
at the Cinema Museum, Kennington.

9.00 – 9.30 WELCOME

9.30 – 11.00 SESSION 1

1. Peter Yeadle – *Recruitographs: a history of the war propaganda film*
2. Malcolm Cook – *How To Stop Motor Cars: Revisiting the Modernity of Early British Trick Films*
3. Mario Slugan – *Daniels' Early Itinerant Showmanship in the Caribbean*
4. Robert Shail & Irfan Shah – *'Cradle of Light: Louis Le Prince and the Technological Aesthetics of Early Cinema'*

11.00 – 11.30 TEA BREAK

11.30 – 1.00 SESSION 2

5. Andrew Shail – *On finishing a job: some more evolutionary history of the UK's first cinemas.*
6. Stephen Bottomore – *Walter Buckstone (1886-1963), pioneering cameraman*
7. Brown, Geoff – *The Alien Menace and the Hidden Hand: Xenophobia, Anti-semitism and British Silent Cinema*
8. Cole Diment – *The Rural/Modern Dichotomy in the South West Phantom Ride*

1.00 – 2.00 LUNCH BREAK

Note that the Cinema Museum cafe serves snacks only. Those wishing more substantial lunches will have to pop out to the cafes and sandwich shops at Elephant.

2.00 – 3.00 SPECIAL PRESENTATION [+ comfort break 2.50-3.00]

9. Toby Haggith introduces *Peace on the Western Front* (1930) with accompaniment by Stephen Horne

3.00 – 4.00 SESSION 3

10. Veronica Johnson– *The Irish Limelight*
11. Denis Condon – *Bombing Ypres in Dublin: Film, Anti-Imperialism and the Irish Free State in 1925*

4.00 – 4.30 TEA BREAK

4.30 – 6.00 SESSION 4

12. Ayan Dawn – *Chaplin in 1920s India: Distribution, Exhibition and Politics of Censorship*
13. Deborah Allison – *'More than a match for many men': Framing Femininity in the Boys' Cinema Weekly*
14. Lisa Stein Haven – *Marriage Farce as Transitional Tool: Monty Banks' BIP debut films, 1928-1930*
15. John Wyver – *British television and the end times of silent cinema, 1928-1930*

Abstracts (in order of presentation)

1. PETER YEANDLE - *Recruitographs: a pre-history of the war propaganda film*

This paper presents a work in progress on what may constitute a new genre of early war film: the Recruitograph. Scholarship has long identified the Second Boer War (1899–1902) as a pivotal period in early British film history, particularly in the production of military and war-related content. Yet one form of film exhibition from this era has received very little attention. The Recruitograph, commissioned and funded by the War Office, was a full-scale recruiting show combining lantern slides, films, patriotic songs, and live lectures, accompanied by army representatives and recruiting sergeants. Introduced in 1901 amid a perceived recruitment crisis, it toured London and the provinces. While actuality films such as R. W. Paul's *Army Life* series and Alfred West's *Our Navy* are recognised for their contribution to popular military culture, the Recruitograph demonstrates an explicit and organised attempt by the military establishment to use film for persuasive ends. Contrary to scholarship that suggests the military establishment did not directly commission propaganda films until World War One, the Recruitograph stands as an early example of explicit attempts to use film as a persuasion method to enhance enlistment and restore public faith in and support for the armed services.

Peter Yeandle is Senior Lecturer in History at Loughborough University. He works on British imperialism and popular culture broadly defined, and publications include essays and articles on the theatre, music hall, dance, education, and zoos. With Kate Newey and Jeffrey Richards, he edited *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture: theatre and society in nineteenth-century Britain* (Manchester: 2016). His most recent publication is "'Mafeking Fever Reconsidered': popular entertainments and wartime news culture in May, 1900", *Cultural and Social History*, 22(3), 2025.

2. MALCOLM COOK – *How to Stop Motor Cars: Revisiting the Modernity of Early British Trick Films*

Motor cars were commonplace in a wide range of early British film genres, but especially trick films. Conventional 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 1990) accounts of these films understand them in terms of 'modernity' and its bodily sensations, with the trick film technique of the substitution splice serving as a cinematic corollary to the social and technological disruption of the motor car in the early 20th century.

This paper will revisit these trick films in the light of our present climate crisis. Animated trick films about motor vehicles are especially resonant with climate concerns, as their dependence on petroleum signals the mass adoption of that fossil fuel, one of the primary contributors to carbon emissions. I will argue that earlier accounts of these films as modern emphasise and dwell upon the effects of technology on the human body. In contrast, climate change readings reorient our focus on technology's relationship with landscapes and non-human bodies. The resulting readings of these automobile films hold wider implications for our stylistic assessment and periodisation of early cinema, the placement of animation within it, and the part these films can play in our response to environmental crisis.

Malcolm Cook is Associate Professor of Film at the University of Southampton. He is the author of *Early British Animation: From Page and Stage to Cinema Screens* (2018) and co-editor (with Kirsten Moana Thompson) of the collection *Animation and Advertising* (2019). His current research focuses on useful animation, especially in relation to petroleum industries, with recent articles on this published in *Media+Environment* (2024) and *Open Screens* (2024).

3. MARIO SLUGAN – *Daniels' Early Itinerant Showmanship in the Caribbean*

There has been little discussion of the earliest film screenings in the Caribbean and even the dates remain uncertain. James M. Burns (2013, 2020), for instance, cites the Kingston Jamaica *Gleaner* newspaper article "Theatre Royal Announces Debut of 'Cinematograph'" to put the date at November 1, 1897. Emiel Martens (2018), by contrast, draws on Terry Ramsay's (1929) early film history to invoke January 5, 1897, as the time when Porter and Daniels presented a Projectoroscope in Jamaica. The next people who deserve mention in both Burns' and Martens' accounts are the Ireland brothers who, as Paul Moore (2025) has recently discussed at length, toured the Caribbean from 1902 to 1908. Far less has been said about Daniels, however, who also toured the region but did so half a decade before the Ireland brothers. This paper, therefore, will provide a fuller picture of Daniels' activities in the region at the turn of the century. It will map the locations Daniels visited, identify the films that he exhibited, unearth audience reports about moving images within the broader discourse of colonialism and modernity, and discuss how these experiences compared across different imperial boundaries crisscrossing the Caribbean. To do so, I will consult local newspapers such as *Jamaica Gleaner*, *Barbados Agricultural Reporter*, *Le Nouvelliste* (Port-au-Prince), *The Nassau Guardian*, *Port of Spain Gazette*, *The Voice of Saint Lucia*, and *The Dominica Guardian*.

Mario Sluga is Reader in Film at Queen Mary University of London. He is the author of four monographs including *Fiction and Imagination in Early Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and eight edited volumes including *New Perspectives on Early Cinema History: Concepts, Approaches, Audiences* (Bloomsbury, 2022, with Daniel Biltereyst) and “Early Cinema in the British Colonies” (*Early Popular Visual Culture* 2025.1-2, with James Burns). He is further exploring the latter topic as part of his Philip Leverhulme Prize (2025-28).

4. ROBERT SHAIL & IRFAN SHAH – ‘Cradle of Light: Louis Le Prince and the Technological Aesthetics of Early Cinema’

In 2024, the newly established Early Cinema Research Group (ECRG) at Leeds Beckett University began the *Cradle of Light* project. Combining material from the recently acquired Stephen Herbert Archive (BFI) with its own original research, the ECRG began to study the design and construction of inventor, Louis Le Prince’s 1888 single lens motion picture camera. With an historiographical imperative to not simply reverse engineer from the finished design, but to build from scratch (exploring alternative solutions to problems at every stage) in order to better understand Le Prince’s thought processes. This approach has led somewhere more unexpected as well, as the ECRG began to discern an interplay between technological concerns and more creative ones in Le Prince’s work.

Specific technological challenges became creative provocations that may have influenced aesthetic approaches to silent filmmaking. *Cradle of Light*, therefore, is not simply an engineering project but an attempt to understand the aesthetic approach behind the sequences that Le Prince shot – and *would have* shot had he not disappeared in 1890. The ECRG proposes to present Le Prince as the first great, ‘lost’ filmmaker, and will also introduce its work on shooting a number of short, silent films with a working replica of the camera.

Robert Shail is Director of Research and Professor of Film in Leeds School of Arts at Leeds Beckett University. He is widely published on postwar British cinema including stardom, directors, and the representation of masculinity. In recent years, his work has focused more on the culture of childhood. He was instrumental in bringing the Stephen Herbert Archive to Beckett and in establishing the ECRG.

Irfan Shah is an independent scholar and author (and Associate Staff member at Beckett) who has established an international reputation as a leading scholar on early cinema technology in Leeds and the Yorkshire region (home to the first films ever shot), and specifically on Louis Le Prince. He is principal curator of the Stephen Herbert Archive and was technical advisor on *The First Film* (2015), a documentary on Le Prince.

TEA BREAK

5. ANDREW SHAIL - On finishing a job: some more evolutionary history of the UK’s first cinemas

At the 2024 British Silent Film Festival Symposium, I outlined a cultural-evolution model of the emergence of the first cinemas, with some supporting evidence from Malvern and Hartlepool, but ending on a titillating admission that I was only part-way through the work of tracing the lineages of entertainment venue that gave rise to the first cinemas in the North East of England. My ignorance of the life of one George Black and the origins of the first cinema in Sunderland, the Picture House on the Monkwearmouth side of the Wear, is now diminished. With help from George Black’s great granddaughter and the usual medley of local archives, I have been able to trace the pre-history of what was definitely the first cinema in the North East, probably the first cinema in the North, and maybe even the first cinema in the UK. For waiting two years, you deserve, and will be rewarded with, some particularly tasty findings.

Andrew Shail is an independent cinema historian and author of *The Origins of the Film Star System* (2019). He co-organises Newcastle Skeptics in the Pub.

6. STEPHEN BOTTOMORE – Walter Buckstone (1886-1963), pioneering cameraman

This illustrated presentation is about British cameraman Walter Buckstone, who worked in the film industry in the UK and abroad from about 1909 to the 1950s. My presentation is based on a small collection I bought last year, which evidently once belonged to Buckstone himself. It consists of several production stills and printed programmes, relating to about a dozen films from 1910 to the 1920s. Based on this material and other sources I can now credit him with camerawork on some 30 fiction films - and much nonfiction too (whereas IMDB has only two credits for him). From the teens to the 20s he shot films for Will Barker, George Pearson, Samuelson, Progress Films and Ideal, with performers including Lupino Lane, Hilda Trevelyan and Peggy Hyland. These personalities and studios are depicted in the collection, which also reveals interesting aspects of lighting and set design. While Buckstone never reached the top rank of cameramen, he was one of the expert technicians who helped to establish the British cinema in its early decades.

Stephen Bottomore worked for over two decades as a TV documentary producer in various parts of the world. He has also published many articles and two books on diverse aspects of early film history such as war, politics, royalty, editing, caricatures, sound effects, film preservation, the magic lantern, local films and film-related fiction.

7. GEOFF BROWN – The Alien Menace and the Hidden Hand: Xenophobia, Anti-semitism and British Silent Cinema

"One of the first duties of Fascism," wrote A.K. Chesterton in 1936, "will be to recapture the British cinema for the British nation" and free it from "the alien stranglehold". Mosley in the 1920s hadn't that in mind at all, but anti-semitism was already embedded in the UK, and only grew with the First World War. Hence Laurence Cowen's extraordinary 1916 film *It is For England!*, concerning an odious German Jewish immigrant, one of the "hands" supposedly ruining Britain. Its 1918 re-release as *The Hidden Hand* coincided with an attack on the German Jewish background of leading personnel at the Ideal company, whose current prestige production was a biographical film about David Lloyd George, subsequently suppressed. Another milestone was A.H. Lane's book *The Alien Menace* (1928), which featured increased coverage of Jewish cinema personnel in each successive edition. In 1921, British and Colonial's Edward Godal had blithely argued that anti-Jewish films couldn't succeed here as the cinemas were largely in Jewish hands and the British public believed in fair play. None of that stopped talk of the "alien menace" growing, or slowed the ease with which the nationalist rhetoric surrounding the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act could tip over into the aggressive alien baiting later fomented by British Fascists.

Geoff Brown, Honorary Research Fellow in Cinema and Television History at De Montfort University, is the author of *Silent to Sound: British Cinema in Transition* (2024), editor of *Alistair Cooke at the Movies* (2009), and a classical music critic and former film critic for *The Times*. His writings on British cinema have also appeared in *The Journal of British Cinema and Television*, *Film History*, *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, and the book collections *Destination London*, *Ealing Revisited*, etc.

8. Cole Diment: The Rural/Modern Dichotomy in the South West Phantom Ride

My proposal would concern the rural/modern divide present within early phantom rides in the South West of England. The presentation would seek to investigate the social history within the representation of spaces and technology in these films, teasing out the implications of British social class within this. The main tension present in these films is the friction between the rural landscapes of the South West and the amalgam of the camera and the train in the phantom ride's dynamic point of view. The films delight in the rural South West either as a purely picturesque aesthetic experience or as a classist fascination with a pre-rural England, often to the detriment of the poor rural inhabitants. At the same time, the camera+train technology collapses the distance between the rural and the urban-modern, absorbing the rural into a new image repertoire of the modern city as a space of aesthetic contemplation. Whilst possibly beyond the scope of this presentation, I would seek to contextualise these aesthetic-social processes within the actual historical change of the social fabric of the South West countryside.

Cole Diment is a recent graduate from the MA Film Studies programme at King's College London. His MA thesis was on the South West of England in early silent cinema and he is currently pursuing research on this topic post-graduation. He was a member of the 2025 Pordenone Collegium.

LUNCH BREAK

9. SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Toby Haggith and Stephen Horne present *Peace on the Western Front* (1930)

10. VERONICA JOHNSON - *The Irish Limelight*

In January 1917 the first edition of the first Irish film magazine *The Irish Limelight* ("The only Irish journal devoted to cinema and theatrical topics") reached the stands. Taking its cue from American and British film magazines it covered national and international news about the film industry, offered reviews of the latest films and interviews with Irish stars. The establishment of such a magazine indicates that there was enough film activity in Ireland at that time to warrant such a publication and that there was an audience in Ireland interested in learning about the film world from an Irish perspective. And indeed with indigenous film production at its highest in Ireland in the mid to late 1910s, the time was right to launch a film magazine.

This paper examines all available issues of *The Irish Limelight* showing how it balanced local and international film news and how it offered the reader a sense of the developing Irish film industry in the last years of the 1910s.

Veronica Johnson is an early and silent film historian whose research focuses on the Film Company of Ireland, female film pioneers and the emergence of the cinema manager. She is a council member of the International Association for Media and History and co-editor and book review editor of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. Her work has been published in numerous journals including *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Media* and is forthcoming in Manchester UP and Rutgers UP.

11. DENIS CONDON - *Bombing Ypres in Dublin: Film, Anti-Imperialism and the Irish Free State in 1925*

On the morning of 20 November 1925, the Masterpiece cinema in Dublin's Talbot Street was attacked with an incendiary bomb, extensively damaging the box office and lobby, and ending the troubled run of *Ypres* (British Instructional Films, 1925). Released on 9 November to coincide with Armistice Day, the film had been stolen by armed men as an audience was seated in the auditorium awaiting the first screening. While the raiders were praised for their anti-imperialist gesture at a protest against the Free State government's commemoration of Armistice Day, a second print was proving very popular until the cinema was bombed and two members of the Garda Síochána (police) were shot as the bombers made their escape. When a week later the distributors removed the film from distribution in the Free State, the trial of the bombers kept cinema at the centre of public discourse on the nature of the new state and who could control its public realm.

Denis Condon lectures on cinema at the Departments of English and Media Studies in Maynooth University. His publications include *Early Irish Cinema, 1895-1921* (2008) and as co-editor *Music and Visual Cultures: Threshold, Intermediality, Synchresis* (2021). He is currently working on the book *The Explosion of Images: Ireland's First Cinemas* and the collaborative website Ireland's First Cinemas.

TEA BREAK

12. AYAN DAWN - *Chaplin in 1920s India: Distribution, Exhibition and Politics of Censorship*

The Euro-American gaze on Chaplin's cultural afterlife (Murphy, 2010; Stokes, 2016) neglects his transnational circulation in South Asia. The *Indian Cinematograph Committee* report (1927-28) mentions Chaplin's massive stardom in Colonial India ("Evidence", vol. 1, 239). *National Film Archive of India's* (NFAI) Censor Records (Bengal [1920s] and Bombay [1930s]) reveal that the British Empire never censored Chaplin's films. Drawing on star studies (Dyer, 1979), Chaplin studies (Maland, 1989; Gunning, 2010), cultural studies (Appadurai, 1990) and transnational studies (Durovicová and Newman, 2009), I analyse *Charlie Chaplin Archive*, NFAI's Censor Records, UK's India Office Records, and University of Warwick's *Times of India* archive to investigate Chaplin's films' politically-loaded distribution, exhibition and censorship politics in 1920s India. Using 'new film history' (Chapman, Glancy, & Harper, 2007), I critically analyse: How did Chaplin's films reach India? When, where, and under what conditions were they exhibited? Why were his films prioritised and who distributed them? Why were Chaplin's films uncensored?

Given colonial and postcolonial dynamics shaping transnational stardom, this paper unravels the complicated nexus of Empire's politics and Chaplin's impact in 1920s India.

Ayan Dawn completed his BA (Hons.) in English at the University of Calcutta and his MA in English at the University of Delhi. He is currently a full-time PhD student (fully funded by Warwick's Chancellor's International Scholarship) at the Department of Film and Television Studies, University of Warwick, where he is researching on Charlie Chaplin and the cultural politics of transnational appropriation, reception and impersonation. Before joining academia, he served as a consultant editor at Penguin Random House India.

13. DEBORAH ALLISON = 'More than a match for many men': Framing Femininity in the *Boys' Cinema Weekly*

Published in Britain by the Amalgamated Press, the little-studied 'Boys' Cinema Weekly' (1919–1940) was the only cinema fan magazine of its day designed to cater to a primarily juvenile male readership. It originally carried a mixture of fiction and non-fiction material before, after a change of ownership in 1926, its wide variety of content was discarded in favour of retold screen stories. This early period provides fascinating insights into its publisher's attempts to reposition American stars as exemplars of traditionalist and socially desirable models of British adult masculinity. Yet, despite an overwhelming focus on male performers, 'Boys' Cinema' is also notable for its less classical representations of female stars, offering a compelling study of how the branding of performers such as Pearl White and Ruth Roland was adapted to appeal to juvenile male film fans. Contrasting with the prevailing norms of feminine representation in magazines such as 'Picture Show', its images and editorial demonstrate how, for young male readers, female merit and appeal was benchmarked against a specific model of masculinity. Evidence of a secondary female readership also allows us to explore female desire for a broader spectrum of feminine representations than the mainstream of contemporary fan discourses encouraged.

Deborah Allison is a London-based cinema programmer and an associate research fellow at De Montfort University's Cinema and Television History Research Centre. She is the author of 'The Films of Aleksandr Rou: Father of Soviet Fairy-Tale Cinema' (2005), 'Film Title Sequences: A Critical Anthology' (2021) and 'The Cinema of Michael Winterbottom' (2012), and co-author of 'The Phoenix Picturehouse: 100 Years of Oxford Cinema Memories' (2013).

14. LISA STEIN HAVEN – “Marriage Farce as Transitional Tool: The Case of Monty Banks’s BIP debut films, 1928-1930”

Italian silent comedian Monty Banks, after a successful career in film comedy in the United States, abruptly left his adopted country for a complete restart in the UK, much like other Hollywood stars and directors at the end of the silent period. Right away, he put out his shingle with both “Star” and “Director” upon it and took what he could get. What he “got” was a contract with British International Pictures, which utilized him right away both as a star and director. Banks directed Danish comedians Pat and Patachon in silent comedy *Cocktails* (1928), music hall star Wee Georgie Wood in sound film *The Black Hand Gang* (1929) and, concurrently, three starring or co-starring roles. Important for this presentation are these starring roles, all marriage farces. Farce, in one definition, is “an extreme form of comedy in which laughter is raised at the expense of probability, particularly by horseplay and bodily assault” (qtd. In Bentley, 1958, vii). It “brings together the direct and wild fantasies, and the everyday and drab realities, the interplay between the two [then becomes] the essence of this art—the farcical dialectic” (Bentley, 1964, 241).

One of the assumptions by this researcher is that this particular film genre worked especially well as a transitional one for Banks, moving as he did from silent comedy to sound (in a second language), from starring to co-starring roles, to only directing. The films *Adam’s Apple* (1928), directed by Hollywood’s Tim Whelan, *Week-end Wives* (1929) by another Hollywood exile Harry Lachman, both silent, and *The Compulsory Husband* (1930), a sound film, which Banks co-directed with Lachman, will serve as source material for this investigation.

Lisa Stein Haven is a Professor of English at Ohio University Zanesville, who specializes in silent film comedy research. She has written six books on figures such as Charlie and Sydney Chaplin, Max Linder, and Buster Keaton, and is currently writing on Monty Banks. She presented her recent book, *Early Buster Keaton: From the Vaudeville Stage to Comique Films, 1899-1920* (Pen & Sword, UK, 2025) at the Chipping Campden Literature Festival in May 2025.

15. JOHN WYVER – British television in the end times of silent cinema, 1928-30

In the week that *The Jazz Singer* opened in London in September 1928, the Baird Television Development Corporation launched its ‘Televisor’ receiver at the popular trade show Radiolympia. The close-circuit 30-line presentations initiated the ideas of a television presenter and a structured schedule, and fascinated viewers at the show subsequently at demonstrations at Selfridges.

Over the next two years television’s development was intertwined with the end times of silent cinema in Britain. This paper explores the parallels and links between film and early television, including the transmission of film by the Baird company, comparisons made by commentators of the crude 30-line images with the first films, television on a variety bill at the London Coliseum, and the beginnings of ‘cinema television’, which would become a significant development in the immediate pre-war years.

Extending the researches of Geoff Brown, the paper further speculates about the possible influence of multi-camera filming on the first sound films, including *Dark Red Roses* (1929) and *Rookery Nook* (1930), on the studio techniques of high definition television after 1936.

John Wyver is a writer and producer with Illuminations and Professor of the Arts on Screen, University of Westminster. His broadcast productions have been honoured with a BAFTA, and International Emmy and a Peabody. He is the author of *Screening the Royal Shakespeare Company: A Critical History* (2019) and co-editor of *Screen Plays: Theatre Plays on British Television* (2022). His most recent publication is *Magic Rays of Light: Early Television in Britain* (2026)