

The 19th British Silent Film Festival



Slow Silents: Life on the Canal



Presented by Bryony Dixon

Sunday 17 September 1.30pm

Dir: Various, 1899 – 1928, 80mins, silent

The twentieth century was all about progress and speed but we take life at an easier pace with this collection of films about life on the waterways and canals. Since the earliest panoramas there has always been a synergy between film and the steady walking pace movement of the barge – perhaps too the boundaries of the celluloid strip and the banks of the canal share an aesthetic. The strange parallel universe of life on the water provides the perfect setting for tense drama and in the non-fiction film it is the perfect way to see the world (as it was) go by.

Bryony Dixon

Panorama of the Grand Canal Venice (1898) 1 min, British Mutoscope and Biograph Company

This view of the Grand Canal was taken from a boat during W K L Dickson's two-month tour of Italy. Made on large format 68mm film, the detail is fabulous.

Canal Life of St Omer (1910) 7 mins, Pathe Freres

Slightly strange film of an unusual community living in the wetlands of St Omer in Northern France – long since drained. In the 1910s everything went by boat including the recently 'dear departed'. Getting the farm animals to market proves a challenge.

Through Paris on the Seine (1911) 6 mins, Urbanora

Views of Paris filmed from a boat on the canalised Seine taking in views of the bridges and the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame.

Barging through London (1924) 11 mins

This episode of Harry B Parkinson's *Wonderful London* series takes a trip on the Regent's Canal from the Docklands through the East End of London, to Hackney, Islington and King's Cross, past Little Venice and the Zoo to Paddington Basin. The view from the barge offers an unusual view of the City not seen in conventional travelogues.

Etudes sur Paris (1928) extract 54 mins

One of the finest of the city symphonies, a central form of cinematic modernism, *Etudes sur Paris* takes the waterways as its main highway through Paris. Again, the view from the rivers and canals present us with unusual views and a fascinating record of the life of the French capital. The filmmaking is adventurous, occasionally vertiginous but often calm and languid as we mosey through one of the world's most beautiful cities.

Programme note compiled by Bryony Dixon



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