

New Discoveries in British Silent Film

Sunday 18 April, 9pm

Two presentations showcasing new research in
British silent film

In a Jungle Near You

David Williams

In January 1913, American millionaire Paul J. Rainey's film *African Hunt* had its premiere at the Holborn Empire; the first feature length expedition film to be shown in Britain. Up to this time, natural history films had been short subject items, but the expedition films of Cherry Kearton with Theodore Roosevelt and Charles (Buffalo) Jones had provided an added interest to the genre. The origin of the general public interest in wild and exotic animals can be traced back through lantern shows, circuses, menageries, zoos and natural history museums. The cinematograph was able to capture the animal images and movements in their natural habitats even though the main purpose of the expeditions was big game hunting. Contemporary reviews of the films reveal just how important, to our understanding of the real lives of wild animals, these films were, and how this interest could be exploited by producers, renters and showmen. Extracts from the original Rainey film have been obtained from the paper print preserved in the Library of Congress Motion Picture Division.

Before and After Nanook

Tony Fletcher

'I propose to show examples from a variety of ethnographic type films taken by travelling cinematographers from Britain between 1924 and 1926 and to look at the various ways that these films were documented from what seems on the surface to be straightforward recording of events and situations to arranged artificial scenes. The earliest example I would like to have shown is however not known to be extant. In 1902/03 Joseph Rosenthal was filming in Canada for Charles Urban of the Warwick Trading Company. "Hiawatha, The Messiah of the Ojibway" was a dramatisation of Longfellow's poem enacted by a North American Indian tribe. The film which ran for 800ft. had 20 scenes including an 'Elk Dance'. I shall also examine films documenting peoples in New Guinea, Morocco, China, South Africa, India and Nigeria

Screenings and extracts will include: ***Motu dances in Hanuabada Village*** (1904)

One of a group of about 10 films issued in Britain by Gaumont in 1904 – similar to the series of four films taken by Alfred Cort Haddon. The film-maker for these films has yet to be identified and whether sound recordings were made has to be ascertained.

Hanuabada translated in "Motu" means "big village", which is situated on the outskirts of Port Moresby,

part of the Papua New Guinea Islands, north of Australia.

***A Moorish Potter* (1907)**

This film was released by Hepworth in September 1907. The film shows 'a native worker, working with a lump of clay on his wheel and gradually shaping it into a vessel.'

A Day in the Life of a Rickshaw Boy

This was released by the M P Sales Agency, who described the film as follows: "The Rickshaw is the aristocrat of Durban, South Africa. We see him in the compound hanging out washing, cleaning his rickshaw, painting designs on his legs, preparing his head-dress, enjoying his quiet smoke and then, the real business of the day commences."

Through India's Coral Strands

(Prologue to shortened version)

'Nomadic and gypsy-like inhabitants, the criminal tribes of India constitute a continual menace to society, a terror to the police and a problem to Government.

Their hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against them. Social parasites, they exist by robbery, theft, burglary, blackmail and even murder. Highly organised, independent and fearless, numbering one and a half million.

The problem of this reform is being tackled by the Government on broad, magnanimous lines, in a statesman-like manner. In this work the Salvation Army has played an important part, having under its care about 8,000 people of these tribes'

Palaver – A Romance of Northern Nigeria

Quote from "Africa Journey" by Eslanda Robeson:

"White people are not interested in us. They only want to take away our land and our cattle, and make us pay taxes. Why should we tell them our sacred history and the details of our social organisation."

Prologue to the film

'Less than ten years ago, these tribes were cannibals. The King and Witch Doctor are played by the King of the Sura and the Witch Doctor of the Angas. They speak different languages and worship different Gods.'