

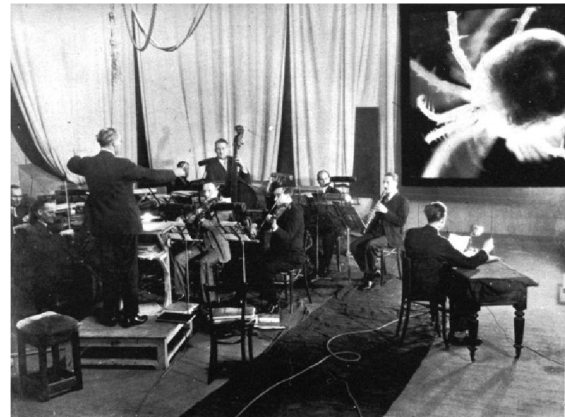
## The Annual Rachael Low

**Lecture:** The Secrets of Percy Smith's  
Life – Making Science Films in Surburban  
London.

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April, 4pm

Presented by Tim Boon, Chief Curator at The  
Science Museum, London

Cinema is well known to have a mixed parentage; on one side the worlds of science and invention; on the other, that of spectacular entertainments. Nature films are the oldest science film genre; the first examples made for the general public were shown at the Alhambra Music Hall, London, in August 1903. After the ballet and the conjuror came the scientific films. Over the ensuing 20 years, science and nature filmmaking grew up with the rest of cinema, and non-fiction films became part of the regular staple of the first purpose-built cinemas. By the 1920s, especially in British Instructional's *Secrets of Nature* series, nature filmmaking was settling down into the stable form that, in many ways, it still enjoys today, with an emphasis on the life cycles of plants and animals conveyed in miniature life stories.



**Caption:** 'Synchronising a *Secret*'. Commentator and orchestra (probably led by Jack Beaver) recording the sound track for one of the *Secrets of Nature*, c.1933.

Tim Boon is Chief Curator at the Science Museum, where he is responsible for the team of specialist subject curators and is a member of the Museum's senior management team. He has been active as an exhibition curator; displays include *Health Matters* (1994), *Making the Modern World* (2000), *Treat Yourself* (2003) and *Films of Fact: The Origins of Science on Screen* (2008). He is a member of the Council of the British Society for the History of Science. After studying History and History of Science at Leeds University (1979-82), he completed an MSc in History of Science at University College in 1986. His doctorate was awarded in 1999 for *Films and the Contestation of Public Health in Interwar Britain*. Following a string of papers exploring aspects of the visual representation of science and medicine in films, his first monograph, *Films of Fact: A History of Science in Documentary Films and Television* (Wallflower Press) was published in 2008.

This lecture series was inaugurated in 2007 to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British Silent Cinema Festival and to acknowledge the contribution made by Rachael Low to the study and understanding of British cinema. A main aim of the lecture is to connect the Festival's research mission to explore the little known history of our early

national cinema with the work of a major cultural commentator in a related field.

### Rachael Low

Low is one of the most important figures in the history of the study of early British cinema. Her pioneering studies published as *The History of the British Film 1895 – 1939* (BFI) are an unparalleled source for students of the subject and it remains the unchallenged standard text in its field. We are delighted that Rachael Low has graciously consented to lend her name to this annual lecture series which will celebrate her unique contribution to the field of silent cinema studies while championing the use of film archives for wider research.

### Previous Rachael Low Lecturers

2007 - Sir Christopher Frayling

A high benchmark was set for the inaugural **Rachael Low Lecture**, given by Sir Christopher Frayling. His theme 'Museum without walls - images of the Museum in British film' and was thought provoking exploration of both the cultural meaning of the 'museum' and its representation in British films from the silent era onwards. Connecting the silent era with contemporary cultural work or thinking is one of the aims of the Lecture series and in this Professor Frayling succeeded magnificently.

Sir Christopher John Frayling is a British educationalist and writer, known for his study of popular culture. Professor of Cultural History the Royal College of Art, London's post-graduate art and design school. Since 1996 he has been Rector in charge of the College. He is the Chairman of Arts Council England, Chairman of the Design Council and a Trustee of the Victoria and Albert Museum. He was also a governor of the British Film Institute in the 1980s. Christopher Frayling was awarded a knighthood in 2001 for "Services to Art and Design Education".

He has had a wide output as a writer and critic on subjects ranging from vampires to westerns. He has written and presented television series such as *The Art of Persuasion* on advertising and *Strange Landscape on the Middle Ages* and *The Face of Tutankhamun and Nightmare: Birth of Horror*.

He has conducted a series of radio and television interviews with figures from the world of film, including Audrey Hepburn, Deborah Kerr, Ken Adam, Francis Ford Coppola and Clint Eastwood. He is especially known for his study of spaghetti westerns and specifically director Sergio Leone. He has written a very popular biography of Leone, *Something To Do With Death* (2000); helped run the Los Angeles-based Gene Autry Museum's exhibit on Leone in the summer of 2005; and has appeared in numerous documentaries about Leone and his films, particularly the DVD documentaries of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968).

2008 – Kevin Brownlow

Kevin Brownlow is a filmmaker, film historian, television documentary-maker, and author. Brownlow is best known for his work documenting the history of the silent era having developed an interest in silent film at a young age. This interest grew into a life-long passion for the cinema and a career spent documenting and restoring film. He is one of the most respected and admired historians of the early cinema and has rescued many silent films and its history from oblivion. (Abel Gance's *Napoleon* is perhaps the most celebrated). His initiative and interest in seeking out and interviewing many largely forgotten, film pioneers has preserved a priceless memory bank of the days of silent cinema that would have otherwise been lost. His lecture traced his developing interest in the silent era with examples of the films that have most inspired him.

2009 – David Robinson

The Third Annual Rachael Low Lecture, entitled 'Silence is Another Country' was given by David Robinson, former Times Film Critic who is perhaps best known as Chaplin's official biographer and Director of the Pordenone Silent Film Festival.

David gave an engaging and personal account of a life in silent movies, communicating his own passion for the art form over several decades as one of the world's leading ambassadors for film history.

The 2010 Annual Rachael Low Lecture is supported by research funds from De Montfort University's Cinema and Television History Centre

