Working with Historic Film and Images

Presenting Your Research: Interpretation and Exhibitions
UCL Dig Where We Stand Training Event
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Overview

- Why might you want to work with film and images?
- Accessing film
- Interpreting film and images
- Further resources
Working with Film and Images

- Why might you want to work with film and images?
  - History of cinema
  - Film as social and cultural history
    - Documents of important events
    - Records of daily life
Working with Film and Images

- Accessing film – where to go?
  - Physical archives
    - National & regional film archives
    - Local archives
    - Specialist archives & museums
Working with Film and Images

• Accessing film – where to go?
  ○ Online archives and image collections
    ▪ BFI YouTube channel, London Screen Archives
    ▪ Collage database, local archive websites, History Pin
Working with Film and Images

- Accessing film – where to go?
  - Commercial & educational distribution sources
    - British Pathé, Independent Cinema Office (ICO)
  - DVDs, e.g. BFI archive releases
Interpretation

Questions to ask of a film and/or image
- What type of film is it?
- Who made it, when, and why?
- What can we tell about how it was shot and edited?
- Who was it made for?
- What kind of ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ evidence does it provide?
Interpretation

- **What type of film is it?**
  - Material type: 35mm, 16mm, VHS, digital, etc.
  - Genre: home movie, news film, fiction film, documentary, ‘actuality’, etc.

Video: Panoramic View of the Morecambe Sea Front (Mitchell & Kenyon, 1901)
To watch go to BFI YouTube channel: http://youtu.be/KLRQ8ElrEoU
Interpretation

- Who made it, when, and why?
  - Who?
    - Amateur or professional
    - Government or commercial sponsors
  - Why?
    - To commemorate an event
    - To report news
    - For political/propaganda purposes
Interpretation

- What can we tell about how it was shot and edited?
  - Is the camera moving or static?
  - Do the events look ‘staged’?
  - How many shots are there? Are they in a logical order?
  - Are there any added captions or soundtrack?
  - How do they influence the nature of the film?

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Interpretation

- Who was it made for?
  - Personal/family viewing or commercial audience
  - Any evidence for how it might have been understood/enjoyed at the time?

- Supporting documentation
  - Magazine or newspaper reviews
  - Records of screenings

Try the BFI Reubens Library at the BFI Southbank or your local archive
What kind of ‘intentional’ and ‘unintentional’ evidence does it provide?
- Special occasions or daily practices
- Lost people and places
- Changing habits and fashions
- Social attitudes, cultural tastes
- What people considered educating, entertaining, or worth recording
Further resources

- Online:
  - National Archives: Focus on Film
    http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/focuson/film/
  - History Matters: Making Sense of Film
    http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/film/intro.html
  - Open University: Film as a Historical Source
    http://www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind/film-historical-source