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London Transport Museum Film Collection Online

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We know that London Transport was a pioneer in advertising public transport. Their posters from the inter-war period and the 1950s are a familiar sight and they are frequently used as historical sources not only by academics but students as well. What is less well known is that London's public transport companies also have been using moving images to promote their services and the reliability of their staff since the early years of the 20th century. The London Transport Museum?s website [2] ? an interesting place for exploring primary sources in general ? offers a taster selection of eight initial films which cover the period from 1910 to 1970 including the classic British Transport Films *All That Mighty Heart*, along with a lesser-known gem *Our Canteens*.

Although the film collection which the Museum inherited from London Transport is perhaps best known for the documentaries made by British Transport Films in the 1950s and 1960s, there are other titles to discover which reveal unexpected and unfamiliar aspects of public transport history.

The oldest film dates from 1910 and is 14 minutes long. It shows a journey from Baker Street into Metro-Land and beyond into Aylesbury. The film was shot from the front of the train taking a driver?s perspective. Starting with views on busy platforms the train takes us through tunnels out into the countryside. Temporary signs have been put up to identify each station as the train passes. The film predominantly shows trees, meadows, some houses, stations, tracks and tracks again. But it also provides evidence of passengers, people waiting at the stations and people using trains, for which there are few sources from this period.

There are two films available which were produced in the inter-war period: The first one from 1923 advertised travel guides by the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC). This silent film shows in

moving images what the travel guide does in writing: the old charm of Surrey, historic towns, picturesque villages and beautiful landscapes. The message is that all the splendour can now be reached by bus from London. In the end the film advertises the travel guides and with them the leisure and pleasure trips themselves. The second film, from 1932, shows the new Piccadilly line extension. It clearly boasts about new, stylish, modern stations, underground window shopping, building sites of underground lines that open the way to new suburban housing and clean trains (you see train washers and a modern train washing machine).

These films from the inter-war period make clear not only that this is a transport company in the process of becoming a modern travel undertaker, but also that British society is changing its daily habits and leisure activities.

The remaining five films cover the period from 1951 to 1970. *Our Canteens* (1951) is an impressive mixture between a documentary and an advertising campaign as it shows the work of London Transport canteens (food production, different styles of canteens, endeavour to modernise), while also aiming to entice women to work for the canteens. As the text on the webpage informs, the film was actually used as a aid for female staff in training centres. This film is an excellent source for analysing the history of female workers in the 1950s, and in addition it allows a look behind the scene of a large company.

The Elephant Will Never Forget from 1953 (by British Transport Films) bids an emotional farewell to the last tram in London. It portrays the last week of trams running in London, but also reflects on a tram culture that ended for the metropolis at the time. Tram songs, passengers, conductors, nice views on London from the top deck, couples taking the tram for the sake of a ride (and being together for while), the Kingsway tram subway, the set up of trolley poles and plough changeovers represent different parts of daily urban life that was forced to go in the early 1950s.

Such change becomes even more obvious in the films of the 1960s. The setting has completely changed by then. *All That Mighty Heart* (1962 by British Transport Films) shows a day in the life of London as seen by the London Transport BBC radio programmes. Modern technologies in control rooms organise now public transport, represented by shiny modern buses, trains and underground. Stylish men and women waiting, travelling, arriving symbolise now smooth flows of passengers and traffic and the new pace of urban life. Clerks in newly designed department stores and timetabling offices, dance music, workers in bright canteens, clean buses and trains, modern architecture from the 1960s, supermarkets, leisure activities, sports, zoo, and nightlife; the film links all of this to London Transport. And while the bright world enjoys the opera, shows and nightclubs London Transport builds the new Victoria line for the future. Life is portrayed as modern, bright and shiny and the buses, undergrounds and trains are an essential part of it.

Hey! Ticket! (1969, by British Transport Films) and *On The Move* (1970, also by British Transport Films) repeat this tone. *Hey! Ticket!* shows how people have to buy tickets at the new ticket machines. Passengers are given advice on which automatic gates to use. Different tickets open different gates and different kinds of luggage need different handling or the passenger is liable to get stuck when entering the underground system. The film was shot on location at Hammersmith underground station and combines animation with life action to guide the commuter through the new Automatic Fare Collection Ticket Gates installed on the Victoria line at the time. *On The Move* propagates similar prospects of modernity. It shows how London Transport helps to keep London moving by applying modern technologies (computers, electronic commands, automatisation, functional design, control centres, electronic eyes, CCTV, electronic ticket barriers) and modern organisation (one man buses, pay as you enter systems, wash modes, staff training, route restructuring). The emphasis here is that London needs people moving about freely to be an efficient and prosperous metropolis. Again London?s transport system provides the state-of-the-art infrastructure to keep up with change. In that sense it is praised as a ?one class system with a first class look?.

The website provides some helpful comments with each film. The information provided is very descriptive, telling the reader (or watcher?) what he or she can see in the film. I did however wish for more interpretative guidance. It would be interesting to know why London Transport produced such films, what they were used

for, what audiences they were aimed at, and last but not least how they can be explained within a broader historical context of social and technological change. But maybe such interpretations remain as a task for the interested academic watching and using the films in the future.

London Transport Museum Film Collection Online shows the changing image of London Transport as it was created by London Transport itself. The films are a unique source for analysing how such an image was constructed and how it changed, but furthermore they provide evidence of the daily use of public transport, uses of public space and uses of urban environments. Nowhere else we can observe passengers boarding and alighting busses, people queuing, waiting on platforms, squeezing in underground stations, crossing roads, squares and railway bridges, people working for transport companies and people enjoying their leisure activities and travel trips to countryside destinations. These films are an immensely valuable source for teaching as they are available online, short, and easy to handle in courses. Above all, though, they are enormously entertaining and good fun! Enjoy!

The LT Museum is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further.

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[3]

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