

Capturing moving images online

Ann Cameron

'Archive Live', the online catalogue from Scottish Screen Archive, brings the film and video material in Scotland's National Moving Image Collection to life on the web. Designed to service the general public and the commercial programme maker, the catalogue is an essential reference tool, offering detailed information about moving images from 1895 to the present day. This article describes the planning and decision-making processes involved in actually getting the catalogue online, and provides a look at cataloguing and indexing practice in a film archive.

Moving images offer a unique glimpse into the past, recording people, places and ways of life very different from those of today. It is the responsibility of the Scottish Screen Archive to locate, preserve, and ultimately provide access to, this diverse record of Scottish life. The Archive recently launched its access catalogue online, opening up information about titles in the collection to everyone.

Background

The collection spans a wide range of mostly non-fiction content, ranging across topical, documentary, educational, promotional, industrial and amateur material, including significant broadcast and Gaelic language production. There is an archive of written materials concerning the history of Scottish film production and cinema exhibition as well as a collection of related photographs, oral history, ephemera and publicity material.

Since its inception in 1976, the Archive has needed to view and appraise the huge volume of donated material. The appointment of the first professional librarian in 1990 facilitated the replacement of old card catalogues with detailed computerized records. This led to speedier, improved access to information. In 1999, funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund enabled three full-time cataloguers, working alongside technical and administrative staff, to identify, catalogue and process a backlog of about 13,000 cans of film. The culmination of this two and half year project meant that, with most of the collection documented, it was possible to plan for greater access.

Archive staff, particularly those working in access and enquiry provision, were consulted on what information it would be useful and appropriate to prepare for online publication of the catalogue. The decision was taken to concentrate on those titles that were preserved and copied onto a viewing format, be that film and/or broadcast standard video. A clear idea of what fields we would include in the web catalogue came out of these internal meetings, informed by issues such as data protection, copyright and whether the information would actually be relevant.

Cataloguing and indexing issues

For practical reasons, cataloguing practice was not changed significantly; rather, records were enhanced for

web publication. Selected title records, currently representing around one-fifth of total holdings, were flagged for web publication on the main database. The Archive catalogue conforms to the cataloguing rules set out by FIAF (the International Federation of Film Archives). Titles are described in terms of:

- acquisition details (i.e. collection level)
- technical details (such as gauge/format, stock, track, footage, number of cans, physical and image condition)
- accessibility (master or copy, location of viewing material, copyright details)
- content (full shot-list, indexing for subject, place, personality and organization, genre terms, full cast and credits listing, links to additional and related material such as paper archive records, websites, articles, books and still images – paper-based or electronic).

New personality and organization indexes were created for titles to be published online. These conform to the National Council on Archives Rules for the construction of personal, place and corporate names.

The web catalogue offers the opportunity to browse by broad subject heading or by place. The user can also search for place or subject within the Detailed Search form, combining these criteria with a date range or restricting the results to titles currently on tape, for example. At the moment, the Detailed Search allows basic keyword searching across the text fields of the database, including personality and organization indexes (and could be improved in the future with chances to limit the search, for example using Boolean logic).

There was some concern over presenting the subject index online, as this had been developed in-house to satisfy the unique needs of researchers and to capture the content of the films. Originally based on Sears Subject Headings, terms were also added to satisfy user needs. For example, there are specific index terms for events such as 'Inaugurations and openings', 'Gala days and gala weeks', 'Peat and peat cutting' and 'Salmon fishing'. Emotions, attitudes and behaviour are evident in many of the films, and we have tried to capture this very broadly with an index term. However, the cataloguer must not stamp his or her own interpretation into the shot-list of a film, and the catalogue remains an objective description which people can come to, approaching films with an open mind.

Recently, the film collection of the Orcadian Margaret Tait offered new challenges. Describing much of her own work as 'film poetry', Tait refused to be pigeonholed into a genre or type of film-making. The principles of cataloguing and indexing were applied but did not quite 'fit'. With her more artistic and fictional work, the catalogue described the films in Margaret's own words where possible, and used background information such as reviews and comments from other people, to enhance understanding. Indexing was minimal – with fictional work, we rely on genre terms and background material such as reviews, articles and interviews rather than trying to 'categorize'. It is uncommon to come across such a collection, and it seemed our indexing practice was inadequate. However, the Scottish Cine Biography of Tait, provided in the 'Browse' section of the website, provides the chance to read a short introduction to the film maker and her work, with associated films in a clickable list below. In this way, the website offers another 'way in' to the Archive's collections.

Moving from an in-house customized database to a catalogue that was going to be published for all to see obviously had implications for interoperability. Consultation over indexing practice among members of the Film Archive Forum was carried out (this represents all of the public sector film and television archives that care for the UK's moving image heritage). Because of the timescale, staff resources available and the lack of a common standard amongst the archives involved, it was impractical to move to a new standard such as UNESCO Thesaurus or Library of Congress subject headings.

Web development

The Archive benefited from having a clear idea of what we wanted from an online catalogue prior to consulting web designers. The functional working database of the Archive with administrative and technical detail would be stripped down into a user-friendly, enhanced online access catalogue with supporting contextual and image content.

The website was developed using Scottish Screen's current provider, Screenbase Media Ltd. An online business plan, site architecture, content specification, design specification and technical specification were agreed upon. Colleagues from New Media and Marketing were invaluable in helping with areas outside the immediate concerns of catalogue data, such as setting up the e-commerce facility, the practicalities of hosting selected moving image clips on a separate server and branding ideas.

The online business plan addressed the objectives for the site and agreed on success measures. User groups were assessed, broadly falling into non-commercial or commercial. They ranged across the television industry, commercial/independent production companies, the general public, education/community and reminiscence use, museum/exhibition (non-theatrical) customers and those requiring material for a film festival/screening. There was also a need to reach out to those people who were not aware of the work of the Archive. Success would be measured in terms of visitor numbers on the site, increased enquiries generated as a direct result of the website, increased sale of

pre-packaged and made-to-order videotapes, and expansion of the catalogue itself. Further marketing initiatives would be developed soon after the launch event and when statistics had been analysed.

The site architecture was drawn up, offering a graphic representation of pages on the site. A detailed content specification outlining where information would be located and the reasoning behind it was produced. The creative brief dictated the 'look and feel' of the site. This had to complement the current Scottish Screen design, yet offer search functionality and a fresh identity centred around a catalogue. Two main user communities were addressed on the home page: the interested browser coming to the archive for personal and recreational use, and the experienced researcher working in the media industries. There was some discussion over the branding and domain name for the site, with 'Archive Live' and 'Scottish Screen Archive Access Catalogue' being identified as appropriate. An important concept for the site was that it had to be visually exciting, capturing the diversity of moving images in the Archive and not simply a textual reference tool.

The functional specification proved the biggest challenge, as it detailed exactly how the site would work. A comprehensive listing of fields to be published was agreed, and certain modifications and additions were made to the existing catalogue – mainly involving the creation of relational files and text 'flags' creating a user-friendly interpretation of information documented on the full catalogue. The data for the web catalogue would be uploaded from the Archive directly to the web developer's server and imported into its version of the database. This resulted in a customized solution delivering an online catalogue with easy to navigate contextual links to biographies of Scottish exhibitors and film makers, production companies and institutions as well as an online ordering and payment facility for certain video titles. The detailed search form was designed to service the demands of researchers and those with an idea of what they were looking for, with the option to perform searches across single or combined fields. The browse option guides less experienced users to various ways into the catalogue, with a 'topics', 'places', 'subjects', 'videos for sale' and 'all titles' listing offered. In addition, still image files and Quicktime moving image clips were built into the functionality of the site so that potentially every title can have a picture and a clip featured on its catalogue record.

Launch

A launch event was held at the National Library of Scotland to publicize the new website. The Minister for Culture, Frank McAveety, was principal speaker, and Scottish Screen's Chief Executive and Archive Curator spoke of the new possibilities this new resource offered to the widest range of people in Scotland and beyond. Cameron Stout, winner of Big Brother 4, and his brother, BAFTA Award-winning television presenter Julyan Sinclair, gave their personal illustration of how film in the archive evoked memories of their childhood on Orkney, and offered a unique and immediate form of historical record. A demonstration of the catalogue was offered, as was the chance to

explore the site on computer and network with various colleagues. Press coverage of the event was comprehensive, with pieces on the STV and BBC news as well as numerous national and regional newspaper stories.

The future

The experience of putting the Archive's accessible collection online has been incredibly satisfying. Many of the detailed records can now be explored all over the world at any time, and the collection of published titles grows week by week. People can read detailed shot-lists describing the content of a title, explore lists of related films by selected Scottish film makers and production companies, and arrange to view or purchase footage. The website has enabled people to do their own research. Films of Clyde steamships and shipyards, flickering images from the late 19th century featuring Queen Victoria at Balmoral, early experiments in X-ray photography, footage of 'Nessie' and the evacuation of St Kilda in 1930 are just some of the subjects featured.

The Detailed Search form has room for development and there are plans to incorporate more advanced options for limiting results retrieved, particularly on the 'any text' and 'any people text' fields. Feedback from customers has been positive, with comments made on the level of detail offered. One welcome development for the catalogue has been the additional and contextual information received from users, often helping to pinpoint dates and aid identification of images.

A positive effect of the online catalogue has been the

increase in requests for specific titles for personal use, rather than lots of orders for pre-packaged video titles available to buy online. Whether it is the Riding of the Marches in the Borders, a family Christmas celebration, a whisky advert from 1897 or amateur footage of the Beatles playing the Caird Hall in Dundee, people are finding something that relates to their lives and experience. Commercial users are also using the site as an effective research tool and finding easy to access footage to edit into a television programme without having to wait for Archive staff to query the catalogue on their behalf.

User statistics underline the popularity of the site. We have started e-mailing registered users with news and information, and have increased the number of moving image clips available to watch online (about 10 per cent of the 2257 titles have a clip now). Better links will also be made to information gateways and websites concerned with reflecting the richness and diversity of Scotland's culture.

This is a revised version of an article which originally appeared in *Catalogue & Index*, No 151, Spring 2004.

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Indexing children's books

by **K. G. B. Bakewell and Paula L. Williams, with contributions from Elizabeth Wallis and Valerie Elliston**

Society of Indexers Occasional Papers on Indexing, No. 5, 2000, 66 pp., ISBN 1 871577-21-7.
£13.00 (£15.50 overseas); £12.00 (£14.50 overseas) for members of indexing societies



Although index use is of sufficient importance to merit a place in the UK National Curriculum from Key Stage 1 onwards, the indexes to many otherwise excellent children's information books are characterized by omissions, inconsistencies and inadequacies – so much so that the search effort becomes so tiresome and children simply give up.

This thought-provoking publication, which is based on research with children, teachers, parents, librarians, publishers and indexers, helps to remedy the situation by explaining why carefully constructed indexes are so important for children's books, and how they differ from those for adults. Highlighting the essential features that should be included in indexes to all books for children, it includes many ideas for making indexes as child-friendly as possible and examples of both good and bad practice, together with a list of key recommendations. Anyone involved with publishing and indexing children's books should make sure they have a copy of this book on their shelves.

Written in clear, jargon-free language ... a thoroughly useful book. (Newsletter of the Education Librarians Group)

The Occasional Papers on Indexing provide more detail than can be accommodated in general textbooks on indexing and are written by practitioners who bring specialist experience and expertise to their subjects. The series aims to contribute to raising standards of indexing, and to stimulate indexers to think more deeply about indexing principles and working methods.

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