

Stop! Look! Listen!

# Projecting a Modern Britain: Building a New England

## **New Towns in Britain, London Line (Colour series 2) No.25**

*Director:* Mark Lawton  
*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Affairs Office  
*Producer:* Adam Leys  
*Camera:* Peter Thierry  
*Sound:* Phil Jay  
*Presenters:* Michael Smee, Ian Morrison  
1968, 14 mins

## **Playmobile, This Week in Britain No.685**

*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Affairs Office  
*Producer:* Annabel Olivier Wright  
*Presenter:* Michele Brown  
1972, 5 mins

## **Collecting the Past for Tomorrow (second item), London Line (Colour series 2) No.45**

*Director:* Mark Lawton  
*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Affairs Office  
*Producer:* Adam Leys  
*Camera:* Peter Thierry  
*Sound:* Phil Jay  
*Presenters:* Michael Smee  
1968, c4 mins

## **Ian Nairn, The Pacemakers No.19 (also distributed as No Two the Same)**

*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
*Producer:* Adam Leys  
1970, 13 mins

## **New Universities, Calendar No.105**

*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Relations Office  
*Producers:* John Hall, Peter Jones  
1964, c10 mins

## **Essex University (second item), Calendar No.225**

*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Relations Office  
*Production Company:* Mark Broadway Productions  
*Commentator:* Leonard Martin  
1967, c5 mins

## **Warwick University (final item), Calendar No.249**

*Production:* Central Office of Information for the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Relations Office  
*Producer:* Peter Jones  
*Production Company:* Mark Broadway Productions  
*Commentator:* Leonard Martin  
1968, c4 mins

*This evening's programme will be introduced by Linda Kaye, BUFVC.*

The general perception that the Central Office of Information (COI) failed to make any films of significance after the demise of the Crown Film Unit in 1952, preoccupying itself instead with public information films designed to show how dangerous living in Britain might be, could not be further from the truth. In the 1960s the COI made thousands of short films with the sole purpose of projecting a modern Britain onto the large, and increasing number of small screens throughout the world. Although millions of people across the globe saw these films about Britain, they were never shown here. Tonight's programme on architecture is the third in the series *Projecting a Modern Britain*, which explores different aspects of this contemporary image and perhaps more importantly serves to bring these films back home to the people that paid for them.

By the late 1950s the concept of 'projecting Britain', first articulated by Stephen Tallents in 1932, was a fundamental part of the government's overseas communication policy. The opinion of the world, particularly post-Suez, now mattered and mass communications were seen as the primary means of influencing it. The form that particularly suited this subtle assault via national television stations and cinemas of the world was rooted in the cinemagazine, a popular staple of the cinema programme in Britain since the arrival of *Pathe Pictorial* in 1918. Government information officers specifically identified the magazine format, adopted by these short film series to present topical material, as a means of informing millions of people from Latin America to South East Asia about a progressive Britain. It enabled government propaganda to be communicated as entertainment and more importantly, as a series, they were shown on a regular basis, thus operating as a visual drip-feed promoting Britain across the globe.

This programme draws substantially from several major series produced by the COI during this period; *Calendar* (1959-1968), *London Line (Colour series 2)* (1967-1969), *The Pacemakers* (1969-1971) and *This Week in Britain* (1959-1980), all of which depicted aspects of post-war reconstruction, an undeniably modern, if controversial, facet of Britain. These series were distributed primarily to the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand on a regular basis with *This Week in Britain* produced in several versions including Persian, Arabic and Latin American Spanish. All these films basically adopted the same format, an in-depth treatment of one or more topical stories, using regular presenters such as Michael Smee (*London Line*) and Michele Brown (*This Week in Britain*). The exception here was *The Pacemakers* in which the subjects of the film, in this case Ian Nairn and Sir Basil Spence would often present their views and opinions direct to the camera.

This evening's programme begins with a special edition of *London Line* entirely dedicated to *New Towns in Britain*. In the studio Michael Smee discusses the philosophy of planning new communities and preserving Britain's green belt

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**Basil Spence, The Pacemakers No.8**

Production: Central Office of Information for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Producer: Adam Leys  
1969, 13 mins

**South Bank, This Week in Britain No.739**

Production: Central Office of Information for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Presenter: Michele Brown  
1973, 5 mins

**Stop! Look! Listen! – The COI & 60 Years of Public Information Filmmaking in Britain (Pt 2)**

**Into the Jet Age: Aviation and the Armed Forces 1949-1975**

Mon 2 Oct 6.20 NFT2

**Projecting a Modern Britain: Building a New England**

Tue 3 Oct 6.20 NFT2

**Famous Faces**

Fri 6 Oct 6.30 NFT1

**Warning! This Film Might Be Dangerous!**

Sun 8 Oct 4.00 NFT2; Tue 17 Oct 8.45 NFT2

**Crime and Punishment: Part One**

Sun 8 Oct 8.45 NFT2; Wed 11 Oct 6.20 NFT2

**Projecting the Archive: A Matter of Public Record**

Mon 9 Oct 6.20 NFT2

**Crime and Punishment: Part Two**

Wed 11 Oct 8.40 NFT2; Mon 16 Oct 6.20 NFT2

**Swinging London Fashion**

Thu 12 Oct 6.30 NFT1

**Projecting a Modern Britain: Music and Fashion**

Fri 13 Oct 6.30 NFT1

areas with government new town advisor Wyndham Thomas while on location the residents of two new towns, Cumbernauld and Harlow, talk about the experience of living in them. Back in the studio the designer Theo Crosby looks at how events such as Expo'67, which created the public buildings in advance of the residential, might serve as a model in catalysing sense of belonging in the new inhabitants of a development. In *Playmobile* a need that has not been met by the rapid spread of urban estates is examined – the provision for pre-school playgroups. Michele Brown visits a group that have come up with a creative solution, the conversion of a double-decker into mobile play centre. A different concern about the future informs John Betjeman's discussion with Michael Smee on the necessity of preserving industrial buildings in *Collecting the Past for Tomorrow*. In the course of the interview Betjeman also takes us on an impromptu tour of the television studio itself, the old Granville Theatre in a previous life. Community is the theme of the architectural critic Ian Nairn's visual essay on Pimlico, an area he believes has successfully retained a sense of community within recent developments such Churchill Gardens and the new estate at Lillington Street.

The following three items from *Calendar*, look at the architectural response to the specific individual philosophies of the new universities of the 1960s. In *New Universities*, Asa Briggs, then Pro-Vice Chancellor of Sussex University, looks at the current educational revolution in higher education and explains how it will meet the needs of society in the late twentieth century. In *Essex University* and *Warwick University* the respective Vice Chancellors emphasise the importance of design in facilitating the particular learning environment they wish to create while the students discuss how successful it has been. The architect of Sussex University, Sir Basil Spence, is profiled in a film from *The Pacemakers* which examines his recent work, including the Hampstead Civic Centre and the barracks at Knightsbridge, and reveals the motivation and sense of responsibility behind his work: 'after all architecture is a very humble art. It is clothing people's lives. Exactly the same way as the tailor clothes your body, architecture clothes the lives of people, they live in it, you can't get away from it.' Finally, in *South Bank* Michele Brown takes a light-hearted look at the South Bank and the construction of the new National Theatre arguing that current popular criticism of the complex will turn to affection in the course of a few decades.

Linda Kaye Senior Researcher 'Cinemagazines and the Projection of Britain', BUFVC.

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[www.bufvc.ac.uk/cinemagazines](http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/cinemagazines)



The NFT Café is open daily from 10am to 9pm offering morning coffee and cakes, lunch and dinner.

National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8XT.  
Box Office 020 7928 3232. [www.bfi.org.uk/nft](http://www.bfi.org.uk/nft).

The NFT bar is open from 11am to 11pm Monday to Saturday and 12 noon to 10.30pm Sundays. Enjoy riverside views, fine food and drinks.

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