

Stop! Look! Listen!

Projecting a Modern Britain: The White Heat of Technology

Sir John Cockcroft, Commonwealth Teleview No.3

Production: The Central Office of Information for the Commonwealth Relations Office

Presenter: Robert McKenzie

1957, 15 mins

Tony Benn, The Enthusiasts No.4 (also distributed as The Pacemakers)

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

Producer: John Hall

Production Company:

United Motion Picture (London) Ltd

Presenter: Michael Smee

1967, 15 mins

A Major New Power Unit for the World (first item), London Line No.37 (Colour series 2)

Director: Mark Lawton

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

Producer: Adam Leys

Camera: Peter Thierry

Sound: Phil Jay

Presenter: Michael Smee

1968, 4 mins

Chris Evans, The Pacemakers No.1

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

Producer: Adam Leys

1969, 13 mins

Microminutisation, Frontier (Colour series) No.2

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

Production Company: New Decade Films Ltd

1969, 10 mins

Tim Eiloart, The Pacemakers No.22

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

Producer: Adam Leys

c1970, 14 mins

Computer Doctor, This Week in Britain No.786

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

Presenter: Michele Brown

1973, 5 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 science and technology is the second 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; *Commonwealth Teleview* (1956-1958), *The Enthusiasts* (1967), *Frontier (Colour series)* (1969), *London Line (Colour series 2)* (1967-1969), *The Pacemakers* (1969-1971) and *This Week in Britain* (1959-1980), all of which increasingly drew on science and technology to portray a modern 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 Robert McKenzie (*Commonwealth Teleview*), 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 Chris Evans and Tim Eiloart, would often present their views and opinions direct to the camera.

At the Labour Party conference in 1963 Harold Wilson famously declared that

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Science and Survival: Kit Pedlar, This Week in Britain No.802

Director: Charles Leigh-Bennett

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

Producer: Tony Hinton

Camera: Al Films

Researcher/Writer: Jenny Lucas

Editor: Maurice Tarling

Presenter: Michele Brown

1974, 5 mins

Stop! Look! Listen! – The COI & 60 Years of Public Information Filmmaking in Britain

COI 60 Opening Night – Charley Says

Thu 21 Sept 6.30 NFT1

Peace and Propaganda

Fri 22 Sept 6.10 NFT3

Projecting a Modern Britain: Dance, Theatre, Art and Film

Sun 24 Sept 6.15 NFT2

Your Very Good Health

Mon 25 Sept 6.30 NFT1

Britain on the Mend (Part One)

Tue 26 Sept 8.40 NFT2; Wed 27 Sept 6.20 NFT2

Britain on the Mend (Part Two)

Wed 27 Sept 8.40 NFT2; Thu 28 Sept 6.20 NFT2

Projecting a Modern Britain: The White Heat of Technology

Fri 29 Sept 6.20 NFT2

The Best Years of Our Lives?

Sat 30 Sept 6.30 NFT1

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

a New Britain would be 'forged in the white heat of (the scientific and technological) revolution'. Three years later a government department was established that would not only be instrumental in the realisation of this goal, the Ministry of Technology, but in the words of its first Minister Tony Benn, would provide Britain with the role she was searching for since the demise of the Empire. The Wilson government not only asserted that technology was the key to the modernisation of British industry and if you take Benn's view foreign relations, it believed that the country was living through a 'scientific age' that would fundamentally transform it. Tonight's programme looks at key elements in this transformation, particularly in relation to energy and communications, and traces the changing position of scientists within society from the late 1950s to the early 1970s.

It begins with an early edition of *Commonwealth Teleview* in which Robert McKenzie interviews Sir John Cockcroft, then Director of Britain's Atomic Research Establishment, about the construction and operation of the Calder Hall Nuclear power station and the future effects of Britain's atomic power programme. A decade later Tony Benn articulates with characteristic enthusiasm how integral science and technology are to the government's vision of a New Britain in an edition of *The Enthusiasts*. In *A Major New Power Unit for the World* Professor Eric Laithwaite demonstrates the linear motor in the *London Line* studio and discusses its future applications. In the first edition of *The Pacemakers* Dr Chris Evans, the experimental psychologist and computer scientist, discusses his theories on visual perception and the interaction between people and computers. The process of microminutisation and its future, a subject which continued to fascinate Evans throughout the 1970s culminating in his book *The Micro Millennium*, is outlined in the next film from the *Frontier* series. Inventions and the problems inherent in their industrial application are discussed by the subject of a later film in *The Pacemakers* series Tim Eilorat, the founder of Cambridge Consultants Ltd. Chris Evans returns in *Computer Doctor* to explain how computers might conduct the initial interview with the patient and finally Kit Pedlar looks more critically at the use and abuse of technology, particularly relating to the energy crisis, and the new responsibility of science to society.

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

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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.

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