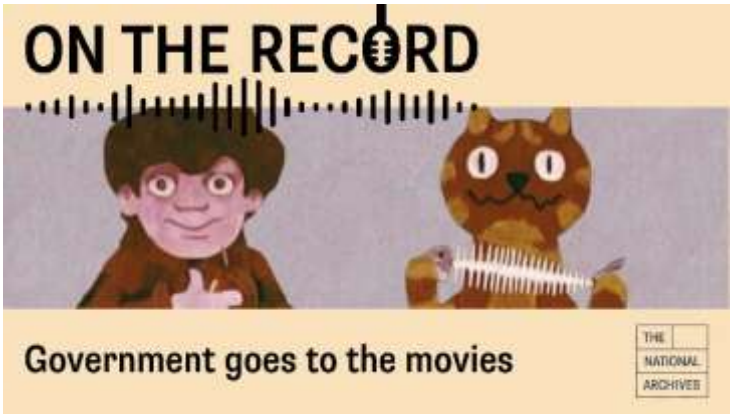
	Show Notes – Bonus Episode Government goes to the movies	THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



In the 1940s, the British government discovered the power of film to inform, promote, and persuade the public, and they created the Central Office of Information to create strategic media campaigns on all kinds of subjects. In this episode, we're silencing our phones, dimming the lights, and digging into 65 years of informative, odd, sad, scary, and funny COI films. If you think public information films were all dry and boring, then prepare to have your mind thoroughly changed.

Documents from The National Archives used in this episode: INF 6/382

Production files for many of the other films discussed can be found by searching our catalogue, Discovery. For advice on searching for films, and records about them, take a look at our guide to Government film-making and the film industry.

All of the film clips featured in this episode are linked to and can be viewed online via the BFI Player or the Public Information Films page of our website. Both websites contain additional information about copyright and re-use of the film clips.

There are many other COI films held by The National Archives, the BFI and Imperial War Museums.

This podcast is being released as part of the #COI75 anniversary celebrations, where The National Archives has joined with the BFI, and Imperial War Museums (IWM) to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the COI. Read more here.

Listeners, we need your help to make this podcast better! We need to know a bit more about you and what themes you're interested in. You can share this information with us by visiting smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ontherecord/

Transcript:
[Intro – clips taken from the episode set to music]

Will Butler: This is On the Record at The National Archives: uncovering the past through stories of everyday people. I'm Will Butler.

Olivia Gecseg: And I'm Olivia Gecseg.

Will and I are both historians at The National Archives in Kew, West London, where we research, look after, and help our audiences better understand the Archives' collections of historical government and public records.

In this episode, we're silencing our phones, dimming the lights, and digging into the thousands of films created by the Central Office of Information, from 1946 to its eventual closure in 2012.

Will: The COI was created just after the Second World War to continue the work of the Ministry of Information. For sixty-five years, their filmmakers produced everything from 30 second segments to hour-long documentaries covering topics like public health, industry, education, rights, road safety, and so much more.

Olivia: Many people in Britain today will remember some of their most impactful campaigns of the 60s and 70s…even if they've never heard of the Central Office of Information itself.

It all started…

> ['Shown by Request' clip]
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> Narrator: It all started in 1940 when films were first taken on the road by the Ministry of Information. People had to be kept informed. Many of them had to be trained and trained quickly to do new jobs. When the scheme began there were 50 of these vans. Each of them could carry films, a screen, a projector, and sometimes a portable generator…for the films had to be taken to their audiences, to wherever people happened to be gathered together in the upheaval of war. The mobile van with its projector is not the only way for the film

shows to reach their audiences. Many institutions and groups have their own 16mm projectors, and on their request, films are sent to them by post free of charge from the central film library. As more projectors become available, an increasing number of films are lent out in this way from the library.

Olivia: So that's a clip from a film called 'Shown by Request' made by the Central Office of Information to explain how their public information films were distributed.

Will: To learn more about this film and the early history of the COI, we spoke to Katherine Howells, Visual Collections Researcher at The National Archives.

Olivia: Katherine, What exactly was the Central Office of Information and why were they making films?

Katherine Howells: Well, the Central Office of Information was really an agency which existed to help government communicate its messages to the public. Its predecessor was called the Ministry of Information, and this was actually a government department set up at the outbreak of the Second World War. It was designed to control information and improve public morale during the war through creating propaganda. But the Ministry of Information really kick-started the development of government communications by using lots of different media. So they used print media like books and posters and leaflets, but also physical exhibitions and radio and film as well. And people may have heard of some of the propaganda campaigns that they ran such as 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' and 'Dig for Victory.'

But when the war ended, it was thought that Britain shouldn't really have a full government ministry responsible for controlling information as a peacetime thing. So the MOI was closed down, and a Central Office of Information was set up in its place; and this was in 1946. And the COI was a more focused organization. It was like a communications agency for government. So other government departments such as the Ministry of Health or the Foreign Office would come to the COI with some idea for a piece of messaging that they wanted to get out to the people, and then the COI would develop a campaign with them, again, using a range of media. And this system lasted right up until 2011.

But of course, film became an increasingly popular medium for this kind of communications work over the course of the century, and particularly with the rise of television, the COI could use film to get messages directly into people's homes.

But the messages that the films focused on varied enormously from things that you might expect like health and safety topics and perhaps recruitment to industry and the military, to messages about Britain's place in the world or different cultures living in Britain or even educating people about particular laws that might affect them.

And it's a question often asked about government publicity, how and where and when did people actually see this material?

This is where the film 'Shown by Request' is really quite interesting and quite unusual because it gives us an amazing insight into how films actually reached the people in the days before television.

> ['Shown by Request' clip]:
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> Narrator: 'New Builders' will be referred to in future as US 229, secondary number 1-20 for each print. Numbers 1-18 only are available for borrowing. Prints 19 and 20 are kept in reserve and on leaving the intake room go to the store. The 18 prints available for lending go to the circulation stacks. Here in code number order, all films in circulation are kept under constant temperature conditions to prevent them shrinking. These films serve some 2000 borrowers. The library holds on its shelves 1000 different titles with a total of 12,000 different prints.

Olivia: So the 'Shown by Request' film is a bit dry...there are over ten minutes dedicated to the administrative processes of cataloguing and lending out the COI collection...but it's also pretty interesting to see everything that went into getting these films out into the public. So my question is, why did COI make a film about lending out films, and what does 'Shown by Request' tell us about the COI and how it operated?

Katherine: Yeah, this is a really interesting question because yes, 'Shown by Request' includes so much more detail about the administrative process than you might expect from a film like this. It was made in 1947, and essentially explains–in quite a proud way I would say–how government films were actually circulated around the country at the time. During the Second World War, the

MOI used mobile film units, which were vans equipped with portable projectors and screens, and they'd be sent around the country to show films to different audiences. And this continued with the COI as well. But then as it became more common for community centres and factories and other public buildings to have their own equipment, the Central Film Library would lend out films to groups who requested them, and that's kind of what we're seeing in this film, 'Shown by Request.'

Olivia: What kind of groups were they?

Katherine: So it could be anything really. It was designed to be open to anyone who wanted to show a film in their local community. So it might be things like schools or factories or any kind of workplace for certain kinds of films or just community groups generally, church groups, any group of people who wanted to show a film for a particular purpose.

But the film 'Shown by Request' goes into quite a lot of detail on the functioning of the Central Film Library. It shows how the films were stored and how requests were logged from different kinds of people, and then how the films would be booked out. And then also things that we just don't maybe think about at the time, how the films would be returned and then how they would be checked for damage. To be honest, it's kind of mind-boggling to see the complexity of the practicalities of managing this process in an age before computers. And interestingly actually, in the production file we hold at The National Archives, we can see that there was a working title for this film which was 'Celluloid Circus,' which is just a brilliant title I think, and makes perfect sense if you watch this film.

Olivia: [Olivia Laughs] That's brilliant.

Katherine: But as you said, the question of why this film was made is a little bit unclear. The production file doesn't really give much away about that. I think that basically, this film was kind of showing off the hard work and the success of the British government in managing what was at the time a kind of cutting-edge media operation. And we do know from the production file one thing about it, which was that it was agreed that the first show copy of the film was going to be sent out to Paris to be shown at a UNESCO conference. So it's clear that the film had some kind of international role in demonstrating to the world how film could be used successfully by government for educating the people.

['Shown by Request' clip - narrator, then a montage of films within the film]

Narrator: These are the kind of 16mm films sent out by the library or taken by mobile vans...

Film Clip 1 Narrator: "In Scotland, Iron Age peoples built a special kind of fort, or rather castle, known as a brock. Some of the best stand on the rocky shores or the Orkney and Shetland Islands."

Narrator: There are shows for housewives who want information on domestic science or health.

Film Clip 2 Narrator: "The symptoms are red and inflamed eyelids with crusting on the eyelashes. Consult a doctor, and he will tell you to remove the crusts by bathing the eyelids with weak boracic lotion or some other solution..."

Narrator: Youth clubs may have films about the sciences or planning.

Film Clip 3 Teacher in Classroom: "First let's look at one of the neighbourhoods and see how that is arranged. Here near the center is the junior school...

Olivia: So 'Shown by Request' makes the claim in 1947 that 15 million people had seen a COI public information film. Beyond the communication agenda of the government, what was the appeal of these films for the public? Were people showing up voluntarily to view these films?

Katherine: It was kind of a bit of a mixture really about why people would show up to watch the films because it depended on the kind of film. So for children, it might be a safety film or it might be a particular industry was interested in showing a training film to their employees. Obviously, in those cases it was involuntary, and they may have been forced to watch these films. But then there would be plenty that would be requested by others, by community leaders of all kinds. In those cases, it would be voluntary. People would come along because they thought the film would be interesting, that they would learn something or that it would be entertaining. I think it's important to remember that we're talking about the time before television certainly, and people would go to the cinema and watching films was a very important part of life.

So in terms of the appeal of these films, I think the Central Office of Information understood that in order for important information to get through to people, it needed to be presented in an

interesting and entertaining way. This is why the COI films that we see now are so varied and many of them are really engaging.

['Shown by Request' clip]

[Music plays]

Narrator: A village hall on a quiet summer evening. But there seems to be something doing...

[Music from film continues over Katherine's next clip]

Katherine: The people who made them were really talented, and in a lot of cases, they injected a lot of humour and charm into the films.

['Shown by Request' clip]

Narrator: A film audience? 'Cyprus is an Island' is a good film, but it's more pleasant outside. No thick carpets, no concealed lighting or padded chairs for this audience. Why here? How did the film get here?

Katherine: But this isn't to say that they are all fun. A lot of these films are very shocking or frightening or sometimes sad, but those that are successful, I think did engage people's attention. And because they engaged people's attention, the message did get through. But you know as television developed and more people had television at home, the COI had to rely less on the kind of lending system that we're seeing in 'Shown by Request.' They could actually get films directly through to people. And in those cases, the viewing could actually be kind of less voluntary in a way because you never knew when you might suddenly see a public information film that would shock you, and also they would be repeated.

But it's also a more intimate viewing experience which may have made them more successful. I think it's fair to say that people might be more likely to remember films they've seen on TV more than one film they may have seen once at their workplace, for example.

Olivia: That's a great transition to our next interview guest, Sarah Castagnetti. Sarah's done quite a bit of research into our COI collection, but she also has a lot of personal memories of growing up during some of the most famous COI television campaigns.

Will: But before we get into the details of those campaigns and play you some clips, let's look at the collection itself.

Sarah Castagnetti: Hi. My name's Sarah Castagnetti, and I work with the visual collections at the National Archives in Kew.

Will: Sarah, how many COI films do we have here at The National Archives. And what documents related to the department, if any, do we hold?

Sarah: Well, the COI made thousands of films over that full 65-year period, so from 1946 up to 2011. But because at The National Archives we don't actually have film storage facilities, the actual physical films are at the British Film Institute or the BFI. And they look after them, and they make them available to people who want to see them. I'm probably going to reveal my inner archive nerd now, but at The National Archives, we've got what are called public records. So that's government records, including films, that have been selected for permanent preservation. But that doesn't mean that we keep everything ever created by government, we just get the selection. And that applies to these COI films as well. So out of all the films that the COI made, only some of them were designated as public records, which makes them the responsibility of us at The National Archives, even though they're physically at the British Film Institute.

But then the BFI and also the Imperial War Museums, they also, of their own accord, selected some COI films and added them to their own collection. So as well as the public record films that BFI have, there are also other COI films that are available through the BFI and also through the IWM, the Imperial War Museums. And it's good news because you can see a lot of COI films online. So on The National Archives website, you can see a selection of 82–I counted them–public information films running from the 1940s up to 2005. And then on the BFI Player and the Imperial War Museums film sites, you can see lots of other COI-produced films. Also, you can get COI collections on DVD from the BFI.

But something that people possibly don't realise is that the National Archives has got lots of background files that tell the stories behind the making of the films. There are around two and a half thousand production files at The National Archives. These production files, they can have things like scripts, contracts, correspondence, shot lists, which is literally like a list of all the different shots that they need to take. And then there are files from the different government

departments that show the decisions behind the advertising campaigns, what the message was that they wanted to promote.

Olivia: In our 'Public Health Crises' episode, we explored the behind-the-scenes documentation for a pretty famous COI film called 'AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance', so go listen to that if you want to learn more about this aspect of our COI collection.

Will: So, Sarah, can you tell me about specific films that illustrate the COI range and approach?

Sarah: So not long after the COI was set up in 1946, the sorts of things it was asked to produce were films that explained the policies of the new Labour government. And for those, the COI–for some anyway–they turned to an animation company called Halas and Bachelor, who made a series of films using a character called Charley. There was one about the NHS called 'Your Very Good Health', and there was another one that followed the 1946 New Towns Act, and that was called 'Charley in New Town'. There was another one called 'Charley's March of Time', which was explaining the new National Insurance policy, and that came into effect in 1948. So over the decades, there were different policies that were promoted and those would reflect the concerns of the day.

> Clip from 'Your Very Good Health' [starts with intro music]

Will: So here's the opening credits of 'Your Very Good Health'.

And the first scene...an aerial view of a pleasant animated suburb with big houses on a tidy grid of streets....

> ['Your Very Good Health' clip]
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> Narrator: In the past, we've had all sorts of public health services such as main drainage and water supply. Everyone makes use of these services, and everyone pays for them. These are all public health services. But the new health act proposes to organise personal health services in the same way.
>
> [Clip continues to play at a lower volume]
>
> There have been many personal health services by different kinds of financial arrangements.

Will: As this voiceover explains the new NHS, a young healthy man in a suit with a puffed out chest pedals his bicycle along a picturesque high street.

['Your Very Good Health' clip]

Charley: Morning George!

George: Morning Charles!

Narrator: Some people could afford them, others could not

Sarah: Health was an important and recurring theme, and you can see the health concerns changing over time with films about TB and smallpox in the early 1950s, to AIDS in the 1980s.

['Aids Monolith' clip]

Narrator: If you ignore AIDS it could be the death of you. So don't die of ignorance.

Sarah: And then in between in the 1960s, there was a big effort made to stop people smoking because there was a link made between smoking and lung cancer. So you get a lot of films about encouraging children not to start smoking and encouraging adults to stop smoking.

Then there were also recruitment campaigns that were designed and run by the COI. So just after the war, there was a film called 'Women in Industry' which was trying to encourage women back into the workforce to help rebuild Britain. And then there were recruitment campaigns for the police and for the armed forces and also for the NHS. And these ran across the many decades that the COI was operating.

['The British Policeman' clip]

Narrator: Night and day, in rain, in snow or sunshine, the policemen are out on their beats, friendly and helpful, being firm where firmness is called for and being kind to those who seek aid. The policeman is a friend of the people, and he knows that they will always turn to him, without fear or restraint, in their time of need.

['Army Recruitment' clip]

Narrator: At 21, Bill Dowling's been to the Middle East, Berlin, and Kenya with the Army. "Ah," you're saying, "that was when the army was travelling." They've never stopped. They're just off again, this time on a NATO exercise to Europe for six weeks.

Narrator 2: British's strategic command forces are training abroad in 21 countries this year. Trained men, professionals. Interested? Get the facts here or fill in this coupon in your TV paper.

Sarah: And then, another area where you can see policy developing is road safety. So as the roads got busier, the COI was asked to promote safer driving and even parking–and particularly not to drink and drive–and then also children's road safety, so how they should cross the road properly and not play near traffic and things like that.

['Green Cross Code 2' clip]

Narrator: Emergency, calling Green Cross Man!

Green Cross Man: Green crosses! Where do you think you're going, you dumbo?

Child: Green Cross!

Green Cross Man: When you get to the curb always stop, stop, stop.

Child: Sorry, Green Cross

Will: Obviously not all films stayed in people's minds as much as the COI would have liked. So what are some of the more memorable campaigns from the 60s and 70s that people are most likely to remember?

Sarah: Mmm, it's kind of hard to answer that without being very personal about it, so I'm going to be personal about it. I was born in 1963, so I've got strong memories of the public information films from around the 70s and 80s. And I think anyone else from my generation will remember, for example, the 'Charley Says' short TV fillers. They had a little boy and his cat that had a bit of a crazy meowing way of talking, a bit like a cat version of Scooby-Doo. There were about half a dozen of these animated films that were used to warn young children not to go off with strangers or to play with matches and so on.

You know, it's hard to imagine now, but there were only three TV channels, and even less if you lived near hills like I did, and you couldn't get good TV signals. These three channels weren't on 24 hours. As far as I can remember, BBC Two just seemed to be the Open University so it hardly counted really. So there was just a very short slot for programmes for children from about sort of the time kids got home from school, maybe about half past three up to about six o'clock when the news came on, and that was all there was really. So the 'Charlie Says' films were played in that short slot. And because there were so few channels, everybody saw them and certainly my contemporaries, people like me who grew up in the 70s will definitely remember the 'Charley Says' films.

['Charley - Strangers' clip]

[Laughing and garbled meowing]

Boy: Charley and I were in the park. Then this man came up and said would I like to see some puppies? And I said yes. And I was going to go, but Charley stopped me.

[Gibberish meowing from Charley]

Boy [to strange man]: "Charley's reminded that me my mum says I shouldn't go off with people I don't know."

Boy: Then the man went away. We went off and told mummy, and she said we'd been very good. I got an apple, and Charley got something he likes.

[Gibberish meowing from Charley]

He says never go anywhere with men or ladies you don't know.

Sarah: I guess I'm a bit in danger of basing this answer on what me and my sister remember, but there was a cartoon about learning to swim, which we could quote pretty much word for word. It's got a guy whose girlfriend leaves him because he can't swim, which is a bit harsh I know, not very supportive attitude.

['Teenagers Learn to Swim' clip]

Teenage Girl: Dave is super, Dave can do anything, oh he's great, he really is.

Sarah: His fairy godmother appears and asks him to make a wish. He says [Sarah reciting the film clip as it plays alongside], "I wish I didn't keep losing me birds." To which she says, "Then learn to swim, young man. Learn to swim." So I mean, even the language there takes me back because people just wouldn't say that now or not on a public information film, anyway. They wouldn't refer to women as 'birds'. So those ones have strong memories, and like I said, we could quote some of those public information films from when I was growing up.

But there were also some rather sterner films like there was one about not polishing a floor and putting a rug on it, where the voiceover says:

[Sarah reciting alongside 'The Fatal Floor' clip]

"If you polish a floor and put a rug on it, you might as well have set a mantrap," and sure enough, someone comes in and slips on the rug and ends up in hospital.

['The Fatal Floor' clip]

[Sound of a man yelling as he falls and crashes]

Narrator: And to think he'd only just come from the hospital.

Sarah: And I feel like those sort of films were aimed at a housewife or the housewife who had the time and inclination to be polishing floors. And that's of its time because it's just not a strong demographic these days really.

But there were some rather more frightening films that were played to older children in schools. I can remember seeing one about smoking and the tar that had accumulated inside the lungs. I think they actually cut a lung open and you could see the tar. And then there was another film called 'Apaches' which was actually directed by John MacKenzie, who later directed The Long Good Friday with Bob Hoskins and Michael Caine. 'Apaches' showed a group of children, each falling victim one by one, to a fatal accident on a farm. So one got crushed by the wheels of a tractor, and another one fell into a slurry pit and slowly sunk below the surface. I mean, it's the stuff of ten-year-olds nightmares, really.

And then a really significant series of films that was released in 1980, which I think are probably the most chilling of the COIs output, and which definitely left their imprint on a generation were the 'Protect and Survive' films. They were made actually by Richard Taylor Cartoons, which was the

same company that made the Charley Says films, and each one was just a few minutes long. They were narrated by Patrick Allen, who was in Hitchcock's 'Dial M for Murder' and a lot of other film and TV shows. He had a calm but authoritative voice, and as you listened to him explaining how to prepare for a nuclear bomb being dropped on the UK, you felt both terrified and slightly reassured as if you could really defend yourself from fallout with leaning a few doors against a wall and adding some cushions. I think the most disturbing bit in the 'Protect and Survive' films was – for me anyway – was the bit about how if someone in your shelter died, you had to put a label on them with their name and their address, wrap them in polythene, and then put another label on them. And then you had to keep them in the shelter with you because it was unsafe to go outside. I mean, we lived with that threat of nuclear war all the time when I was growing up, and those films really just epitomised that fear, I think. And I'm sure that those films and growing up with the threat of nuclear war, had such a lasting impact on everyone in my generation.

> ['Protect & Survive - Casualties' clip]
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> [Sound of nuclear explosion]
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> Narrator: ...if however, you have had a body in the house for more than five days, and if it is safe to go outside, then you should bury the body for the time being in a trench or cover it with earth and mark the spot of the burial.

Will: What can we learn about the past from these films? Why are they worth re-watching and researching?

Sarah: You can learn about the issues that concerned people at different times, what the government wanted people to do or not to do, like not to drink-drive and so on. When we were researching some COI films recently, we looked at a film called 'Insaaf', which is Urdu for 'justice' or 'fair play.' This film was commissioned by the Race Relations Board in the early 1970s. We spoke to some colleagues with South Asian heritage, and we learned so much about who the film would have been aimed at and what they might've thought of it. It's a fascinating area that we're exploring further in relation to 'Insaaf?' and also some other films that were aimed at audiences outside the UK, trying to show what life was like in Britain. So there's so much to find out about how and why films were made and the messages that the government wanted to get across. And to be honest, the films are also a bit of a mini-history of filmmaking over the decades, demonstrating different styles and techniques. It's all – to me anyway – it's really interesting and

really entertaining. I mean I should perhaps warn you that once you start watching these COI films, it can be really hard to stop.

> ['Stupid Git, John Altman' clip]
>
> [People laughing and having a good time]
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> Narrator: Most of us reckon we can handle our motors after a few pints, take it easy and you don't attract the law. But what if some stupid git does this [crashing sound] or this [crashing sound] or this [crashing sound]. Those few pints just cost you your license. So who's the stupid git now?

Will: Fun fact, that 1982 piece stars and is narrated by a young John Altman, who became famous playing Nasty Nick Cotton on the long-running soap, EastEnders.

Olivia: Anyway….as Sarah hinted, there were quite a few films made by the Central Office of Information that were never meant to be seen in Britain. To find out more about the foreign-facing work of the COI, we spoke to an outside expert who first came across the COI's work 30 years ago in Zimbabwe.

Linda Kaye: My name is Linda Kaye, and I'm a film archivist and film historian.

Olivia: So Linda, I believe you have a great origin story for your COI research, don't you?

Linda: [Laughs] Okay. So many years ago, in fact, 30 years ago, I was doing an MA in film archiving and film studies at UEA, and part of the course was to organise a work placement. I wanted to go to Zimbabwe, so I wrote to the National Archives in Harare, and they said yes. So I went for a month and stayed three. And I was searching their holdings and I came across cans of 16-millimetre film and on the front of them, it said 'TWIB' in capital letters and it had a COI logo on it. So I opened them up and I threaded them onto a Steenbeck, and they were five-minute black and white films from the early 1960s–judging by the fashion and the film stock. They featured an Australian woman in the Lake District reporting for 'This Week in Britain'. There were several of these films and I just thought, why is the COI making these films? What is an Australian doing in Britain? Who were they made for and what is their purpose?

And those questions stayed with me for years and years because it was so difficult to find any information about these films. And 15 years later, we were doing an AHRC research project on

Cine-magazines and the projection of Britain and I thought this is my chance to find out about 'This Week in Britain'. And so I went to The National Archives and looked at production documents. I went to the company that was managing COI content at that time, Film Images, and looked at some films. I went to the BFI and looked at some films, and I found out that 'This Week in Britain' was a series that was broadcast on Australian television for 20 years, and the presenters – like Noelene Pritchard and Erica Howen in the early 1960s – became television stars over there, and a thousand of these programmes were made.

But that was only the tip of the iceberg. There were several series made from the late 1950s right up into the 1990s that went out to all corners of the globe. They went out to Latin America, Africa, South and Southeast Asia, as well as the USA, Australia...

Olivia: So what kind of information was shared in these films and how did they differ from their domestic counterparts?

Linda: I suppose the main difference between these films and say public information films shown in Britain, is that they're series that are produced for television. For the most part, they are produced for television. So the format tends to be a magazine-style format so if you think about 'The One Show' on BBC, that's exactly the format that was used for series like 'London Line' which went out in four different versions. One to Australia and Canada, one to Latin America as 'Aqui Londres', one to Africa, and one to the Middle East as 'Adwa Wa Aswat'. So what you get is a studio-based programme which has a presenter, Michael Smee for the USA and Canada, and then different African correspondents for 'London Line', the original 'London Line' that was made in black and white. These featured people like Lionel Ngakane, Margaret Busby, Paul Boateng, who went on to become an MP and Britain's first Black Cabinet Minister. These were people blazed a trail in their respective fields but were also the face of 'London Line' in countries like Uganda and Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s.

Will: Here's a clip of a 'This Week in Britain' segment from 1962...

> ['This Week in Britain No.199 'The Caretaker'' clip]
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> Ann Forsyth: Hello I'm Ann Forsyth in Britain. You might not think it, but this semi-derelict house in London's East End is a film studio, of sorts. In fact, strange as it seems, it may be a

clue as to why more British films in 1962 won top awards overseas. But why should a film company throw away the apparent advantages of working in a proper studio…

Olivia: And you can watch a 1966 London Line programmeme on the BFI Player. It doesn't have much narration in the first segment, but to give you an idea of how it goes, it starts with some fun, upbeat music in the opening credits, which show a black and white montage of planes, scientific diagrams, musicians, and models that closes with the text "African Correspondents Reporting from London." Then there's a slideshow of these great photos of stylish Black men and women dressed in waterproof gear, working on the docks and posing on the docks…just like a fashion photoshoot.

Linda: So because it's a magazine-style programmeme, what you will get is mainly cultural information. You will have stories on fashion, on literature, you will have live performances, live music performances in the studio, you'll also get items on science and technology. The idea here is that ideally, you want to create something which is going to inform, it's going to promote, and it's going to persuade. So you have the entertainment aspect but also in, say this particular 'London Line', there are four stories. The first one is about Mackintosh's, plastic Macs. That's a fashion story. The second is about a creative school in Sevenoaks. The third story features Ambrose Campbell who's a pioneer of high life, sort of a revolutionary musician from Nigeria. And the third is about concrete manufacture. But concrete manufacture really features the British engineering firm, Ove Arup. So it's about promoting a British firm in Africa. And that's a good example of the range of stories.

But the thing which distinguishes them from British content is that the presenters are from the country that they're distributed to. So if it's to Nigeria or it's to Kenya, they are presenters from Africa. The second thing is that these are series, so they're designed to be seen on a regular basis in a regular slot and to build up an audience. And that was the idea in the late 1950s and the 1960s…was to create a demand across the world as television became established.

Olivia: So what's the appeal to viewers around the world…and television stations…why would either want a closer look at the latest in large waterproof British coats…programmeming that's basically cultural propaganda?

Linda: The thing to bear in mind; that the television didn't just start in a blaze of glory and was there across the globe, it took 20 years to become established. And so as the COI is producing

content for different countries, different territories, it's as those television stations are becoming established there. It's providing free content at a time when it's expensive to produce these kinds of programmemes.

The thing to bear in mind when you talk about it as propaganda is that the best propaganda is the propaganda that you don't notice. And as I said at the beginning, when I was looking at these films it was very difficult to find out what they were about because they weren't any credits. And so what the British government were doing is that they were dropping in unattributed items into a programmeme schedule. So what the audience was seeing – say in Latin America – was someone talking in their own language about aspects of British life. And it looked like a travelogue or it looked like a magazine programme. It was entertainment, and that's what people were supposed to think. This was just an entertaining programme.

Olivia: But the British government isn't directing the COI to make these programmes and distribute them around the world purely to entertain and share a bit of fun trivia about life in Britain are they? So what is the government trying to accomplish here?

Linda: There's a creative and there's an innovative, progressive, modern image that they want to project which is rooted in heritage. So you look at, say the opening credits for 'London Line', it's very modern for 1964. It's a collage of aspects of Swinging London. It has Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column, but it also has The Beatles. It has a Black model with these 60s sunglasses.

So the idea is if you are thinking about Britain, you're thinking about a modern, progressive country. But at the same time–especially from the late 1960s onwards–they're also trying to sell British products. This is part of a British export drive. The nature of those programmes changed a little from the late 1960s into the early 1970s with more science and technology-based programmes like 'Living Tomorrow', and that's about selling Britain.

And those programmes were so successful that they actually employed a production assistant to answer viewers' letters that requested more information about the products. These had to be translated and then translated back, and a pro forma letter was sent out with details about the company's contact details. So usually at the end of these series like 'London Line' or 'Living Tomorrow', the presenter would say, "Please write to us at London Line. P.O. Box 48, London SE 1." And people did write in.

Olivia: To wrap up, Linda, what's the most interesting discovery you've made as you've researched these films and their documentation?

Linda: When we were doing the research project about 15 years back, the Antarctic Survey got in touch to say that they had these 16-millimeter films that were called 'This Week in Britain'. And they were watching them every evening on a projector and they wanted to know more about them. So that's an extraordinary example about how these films live on and have another life. So, there you have another generation looking at Noelene Pritchard reporting in one of the most isolated areas of the globe.

> ['Journey by a London Bus' clip]
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> Narrator: London, the largest city in the world, has a splendid road service of passenger buses for the millions of people–visitors, shoppers, workers, and others–needing quick and comfortable transport from place to place. Not only do the busses bring people into London, they also carry passengers out, through less crowded streets to the surrounding countryside. Here, in the near countryside two African students studying in London are enjoying a walk in the field and now have to get back to their studies...

Will: So in all our interviews so far, our guests have addressed or hinted at the creativity and artistry that went into many of these films, and there's been a few well-known names that have come up. For our final segment, we're going to look at the COI collection from the perspective of film studies and have a closer look at some of the techniques filmmakers used to get the COI messages across.

Patrick Russell: Hi, my name is Patrick Russell and I'm Senior Curator of Non-fiction at the BFI National Archive.

Will: So the COI obviously wasn't the only place commissioning short films and television programmes for purposes beyond pure entertainment and art. Can you tell me more about the short film industry in Britain? How did it get started and where does the COI fits into the mix?

Patrick: When people think about film history, they automatically think first about feature films. But actually, when you think about it more carefully and you look at the history, you realise film history cannot be reduced to the story of the cinema industry, the feature film industry. It's much richer than that. There are all sorts of different kinds of films being made by all sorts of different

sectors of what we might call the screen industries. And that goes back really right the way back to Edwardian times.

But the direct roots of what we might think of as the tradition that the COI is a part of goes to the 1930s really. It goes back to when John Grierson started what is often referred to as British Documentary Film Movement. This was basically a group of people who across the 1930s were excited about the idea of exploring the documentary form, the short film form creatively and doing it by using money that came from institutions. That might be industry, it might be NGOs or in particular, it was the state.

Then during the war, they were brought directly into the heart of government which set up the Ministry of Information early in World War Two. This wartime moment was really, really key in terms of what happened later at the COI and its interaction with the film industry because on the one hand, the government set up what they called the Crown Film Unit, which is an in-house government film unit. But on the other hand, its needs for propaganda and public information was so huge that they really had to have lots of other suppliers producing film content for them as well.

So a whole infrastructure popped up of independent production companies whose main bread and butter was making films for government. So come April Fool's Day 1946, the COI gets set up. Number one, it's completely now in the minds of the civil service world that film is absolutely a medium that you will turn to in order to get government messages across, whether to your population or whether to populations abroad that you want to influence. It's no longer a surprising idea here that film has this power to communicate a message. But you've also got this community of filmmakers, this entire sector of filmmakers, production companies and all the creatives and all the technicians who come with it: the directors, the camera people, the editors, the writers, even the actors, they're there, they're ready to enter into the post-war world.

And although interestingly from an academic perspective, it's been that 1930s and World War II period that's had the most attention, I would argue it's actually in this post-war period that this industry really reaches what I would call its ‘high renaissance’ if you like, the period of maximum productivity and the period at which their skills have really been honed.

I think maybe one of the reasons that academics have looked at it less is because in the '30s you can tell the story slightly romantically from the point of view of filmmakers that are finding a new way to fund films in order to experiment with what film can be.

I'd say by the post-war period and certainly in work for the COI that has all sort of settled down a bit. This is not a world of experimenters, this is a world of professionals–highly creative professionals, highly polished professionals–but these are people who know what they're doing. These are people who know how to take a brief, whether it comes from an industrial organization or whether it comes via the COI from a government department or a government agency, these are people who know how to take brief, be told what it is we have to say, what audience we have to reach, what effect we want, and to translate that into filmic terms.

These are people who know how to be able to talk to civil servants and say what you really need here is a short animation that has a very humorous approach, that's the right way to people to get people onside for this kind of message. Or who know how to say actually what you need here is an hour-long drama, and you need to hire some professional actors, so your budget is going to need to be maybe a bit more than you were expecting.

So my point is the COI enters a world that has been forged by the war, and it enters it with understandings about what film is capable of and also what it's not so good at, and enters it with an entire industry available for the task. And they didn't just work for the COI, they also worked for big nationalised industries that were about to be formed like the National Coal Board and the British Transport Commission. They also worked for big, major, familiar household names, private companies, notably, for example, the oil companies, Shell and BP were two of the biggest sponsors of film in this period.

To me, that's really interesting. It's more interesting to me than just looking at filmmakers, as I say, in that very romantic way as if they're just doing their own thing, as if you can just assess their work as kind of pure artistic texts in their own right. Nothing wrong with that, but I'm more interested in actually put a filmmaker into a situation, a controlled situation where they're working under constraints, they have a job to do and they have to put all of their energies, all of their ingenuity and all of their creativity and their technical skills into doing it as well as possible. Every time that happens, the results are fascinating. And one of the great things about the COI is it

happens thousands and thousands of times over across 66 years. So you could spend several lifetimes studying this. I wish I had several lifetimes available to do it.

Will: So you're talking about creativity and artistry, and I don't think we've spent much time on that point in this episode so far. So I'm curious to hear, from a film studies perspective, what's so interesting about the films being made for the COI and other non-cinematic commissioners?

Patrick: I think to be honest, and with all due respect to him, Harry Enfield has done a little bit of a disservice to the public information film. A lot of listeners will remember Harry Enfield's character of Mr Cholmondley-Warner who was this kind of very stiff and starchy and very didactic presenter of public information films that he used in some of his comedy and sketches.

There are public information films like that but actually, the vast majority are nothing like that at all. That's a stereotype that he created there, and it's funny. But you look at most of the films, and while you'll find those things, you'll find so much else as well. So just to give a few quick examples. Richard Massingham was in some ways the first star of the public information film.

Sometimes he got other people to direct him, sometimes he directed himself. His films play fundamentally on, I suppose, what you might call the eccentric and slightly melancholy style of British humour. He had an incredibly characterful face with a lot of quizzical and often downbeat expressions which was used to great comic effect alongside some really nifty use of filmic techniques. Montage, for example, uses a lot of quick montages to create these really snappy, funny, engaging films about things like probably his most famous campaigns that he did for the COI were around not spreading germs amongst one's fellow citizens. So "Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases" was the most famous campaign name. And people love them even now, they're hilarious.

Will: Let's take a look at 'Coughs and Sneezes', which was actually made in 1945 by the Ministry of Information before it became the COI.

['Coughs and Sneezes' clip with Will describing the action it as it plays]

Will: So it opens on a montage of people having pranks pulled on them, getting kicked into lakes and so on.

Film Narrator: You may have met a few people who like doing this time of thing. They're a nuisance I agree, but pretty harmless.

Will: Then a montage of scenes of Massingham sneezing loudly.

Film Narrator [sneezing throughout clip]: You have certainly seen thousands like this. They're not a nuisance, they're a real danger. "Hi, stop it, you! Stop it, stop it! Come here, what do you think you're up to? You've probably infected thousands of people already. What do you think this is for?"

Will: He hands him a handkerchief, which he uses incorrectly.

Film Narrator: Yes, that's alright, but here's another way of using your handkerchief. Now sneeze.

Will: He can't sneeze.

Film Narrator: Come on. Alright, never mind. Close your eyes.

Will: The narrator shakes pepper all over him.

Film Narrator: Now handkerchief, sneeze. Sneeze, handkerchief. Got it? Fine.

Will: Poor Massingham is sneezing uncontrollably with tears streaming down his face.

Film Narrator: Handkerchief, sneeze. See what I mean? [Sneeze] That's the idea.

[Lots of sneezing noises getting increasingly intense.]

Fine, now you can carry on.

Will: [Laughs] It's pretty entertaining stuff.

Patrick: So there's that. In the '30s, the sponsored film – and particularly the sponsored public information film – was closely tied to the development of documentary as a form. And that continues in this period. So I'll give an example of somebody who I think is a great documentary filmmaker.

His name was John Krish. An example would be his outstanding film from 1960 'Return to Life'

The film ‘Return to Life’ was commissioned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to mark International Refugee Year. It did receive some limited cinema release in the UK in sort of mainly art cinema context, I would say, as part of this cinema supporting programme. It's a half-hour film. But it's mainly supposed to be shown abroad-but from a filmmaker point of view, Krish's film is what was sometimes referred to in the business as a ‘story-documentary.’ Today we might call it a ‘drama-documentary’. This basically involved filming real people, non-actors in scripted situations that resembled their own situations, but were stage scripted shot like fiction stories.

> [‘Return to Life’ clip]
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> Boy: Last night for my food I was given a chunk of break. I was hungry, but I wanted to save it for the morning, so I tucked it under my shirt. But soon, I had to take a little piece to help the pain in my stomach, then a little more. Later I dropped off to sleep, hoping I had left a small piece for the morning. When the morning came, there was nothing left.

[Music plays as the credits roll, continues over Patrick’s next clip]

Patrick: And it's a story essentially of a family of refugees coming from–we presume…it's never made clear in the film– somewhere in Eastern Europe and settling in the UK. And it's about their challenges in adjusting to being part of a new culture. Krish was a brilliant director of people, and particularly of non-actors, and the realism and the intensity that he put into this film I think are really quite something.

> [‘Return to Life’ clip]
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> Narrator: Down there, people are waiting for the first sight of a familiar face as a train from the coast to comes to London. There are also these three people, well-used to waiting on a platform. And somewhere are the strangers they have again come to meet. They are always easy to recognise. Through habit, they just climb out and wait to be told what to do next. There is also a look in their eyes that sets them apart from the usual passengers, who moving now into another busy day, do not know they have shared a train with a few of the very people they have helped, helped generously with money and clothes. Now they will need help of a different kind. For they have come to live and work here. And People who have known what it means to run out of hope and run dry of grief do not make easy neighbours.

Will: So what was the larger impact of the short film sector and the COI on the development of both government media and the film industry?

Patrick: I think it's only really now properly being understood. And hopefully, this podcast will help people understand further because there were there for over 60 years, they oversaw thousands of projects. That's decades of evolution of kind of creative practice and understanding of audiences and understanding of how to influence them and understanding of how you play that across different distribution media, whether that's cinema or television or – very late in the life of the COI – the online world, which of course is where the equivalent sorts of films today will tend to be distributed.

It's also about that question of whether they are addressing a mass audience, which they wanted to do with those high-impact public information films of the '70s that everyone of my generation remembers, or whether they were targeting precise segments of the audience, whether that was farmworkers or workers within a particular industry, whether it was nurses in the National Health Service, whether it was children of a very specific age group or children of another age group. There's a lot of sophisticated understanding being developed over that time of basically, how do you take a message and turn it into a product that has been made creatively that will have an effect on the audience and therefore an effect on the world. The COI is mega in terms of any understanding of how we got from the beginnings of the medium to where we are today, where digital media designed to influence us all is in some ways the story of the modern world.

> ['Internet Shopping - Virtual Mall' clip]
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> Narrator: Shopping on the Internet is just like normal shopping. It can save you time and money too. But make sure you get a real address – not just a web address – a real phone number – not just a mobile – and print a record of what you've ordered. If you don't know who's for real on the net, you might end up with virtually nothing.

Olivia: Thanks for listening to On the Record, a production of The National Archives at Kew.

To find out more about The National Archives, follow the link from the episode description in your podcast listening app or visit nationalarchives.gov.uk.

If you want to browse our COI films and watch them online, just visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/films. There you'll also find a link to the BFI Media Player, where you can watch more Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information films for free.

This year, The National Archives, the British Film Institute and Imperial War Museums have collaborated to mark the COI's 75th anniversary. There's a 45-minute film about the COI on the BFI's YouTube channel as well as a shared blog across our three websites. On social media, search for the hashtag #COI75 for more content through the end of 2021.

Will: We've barely scratched the surface of the collection in this episode, so if you are intrigued by what you've heard, there's a lot more to explore. Beyond the films you can watch on our website, you can also use our online catalogue to search for our COI documents and records and use our reading room to request and view documents. If you can't find what you are looking for, you can get help from our team via email or live chat.

Olivia: You know what...we should create a public information film to teach people how to make the most of our collection and services.

Will: Yeah, that could work. Or how about a podcast that's entertaining and informative, but subliminally spreads awareness of our collections and how anyone can make use of them?

Olivia: Great idea, Will. I think we're on to something here. Anyway...

Will: Listeners, we need your help to make this podcast better! We need to know a bit more about you and what themes you're interested in. You can share this information with us by visiting smartsurvey.co.uk/s/ontherecord. We'll include that link in the episode description and on our website. You can also share your feedback or suggestions for future series by emailing us at OnTheRecord@nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Olivia: Thank you to all the experts who contributed to this episode. This episode was written, edited, and produced by Hannah Hethmon for Better Lemon Creative Audio.