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Term Paper

Examining Regional Film Archives:  
A Case Study of the Yorkshire Film Archive

Film archives have a common goal; to collect and maintain a film collection. However, the guidelines surrounding what these archives collect, how they acquire the films, and how the collections are maintained and accessed, all vary depending on the archive. A regional film archive is driven by its relationship to a certain geographical location; however, even regional archives differ depending on country and particular area. The Yorkshire Film Archive is a regional film archive located in the United Kingdom that functions as an archive for the York region, but also as part of a network of UK regional archives. This paper will serve as a case study of the Yorkshire Film Archive and examine how it functions as a regional film archive within the United Kingdom infrastructure. In order to fully understand the role of the film archive, this paper will also compare UK regional film archives to film archives located in the United States, focusing on the Northeast Historic Film archive. This case of the Yorkshire Film Archive will help illustrate the important role that regional film archives play in preserving the moving image heritage.

A regional film archive is an institution that collects moving image material pertaining to a specific geographic region. The archive functions in relation to a particular area and the relevance of content is a very significant aspect in the development of a regional archive. The geographical aspect of the film archive correlates

to the archive's mission and helps to define the parameters for the collection. Also, for the purpose of this case study, a regional archive relates to a specific part of a country and is not to be confused with a national film archive. In the United Kingdom, there are ten public regional archives representing the different regions of UK: East Anglian Film Archive, Media Archive for Central England, National Screen & Sound Archive of Wales, North West Film Archive, Northern Region Film & Television Archive, Scottish Screen Archive, Screen Archive South East, The South West Film & Television Archive, Wessex Film & Sound Archive, and Yorkshire Film Archive. All of these film archives make up the UK Film Archive Forum, which is an organization that represents all of the public sector film and television archives and works toward creating a national moving image archive policy. So though these regional film archives are separate entities, they work together to help preserve the moving image heritage of the United Kingdom.

Most of the regional archives include the major cities; however, London is missing from the public regional archive coverage. This may seem rather unusual as moving image materials pertaining to location or content about London is rather prolific. There are many moving image collections with a regional emphasis on London, which are part of larger collections in private archives, museums, or libraries. Though there is no specific regional archive for London, there is a regional network—London's Screen Archives—that helps support all organizations in London that contain moving image material collection. The main function of London's Screen Archives is to help researchers and the public locate and access the moving image material in these collections. Northern Ireland is another region of the UK that does not have a focused regional film archive; however, there are museums and archives with moving image

material pertaining to the Northern Ireland region, for instance the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. To help navigate all of these separate moving image collections, the Northern Ireland Film and Television Commission, which is an organization dedicated to the development of the film industry and culture in Northern Ireland, implemented the Digital Film Archive (DFA). The DFA contains approximately 70 hours of moving image content pertaining to the Northern Ireland region from 1897 to 2000. While the archive is not online, there is an online catalog of all the materials, as well as a list of the archives and museums where people can go to access these materials.

The National Screen & Sound Archive of Wales and the Scottish Screen Archive Scotland have a national component in terms of the Welsh and Scottish culture, but they still reflect regions within the UK and therefore make are considered part of the regional film archive network. The UK's national film archive is The British Film Institute National Archive, which as acts as a "national repository of films of permanent value<sup>1</sup>," collects film and television material pertaining to the UK. The National Archive is much larger than the regional film archives as BFI has a wider focus then the regional archives. However, they all work together to ensure the preservation of the United Kingdom's moving image heritage.

The United States has many film archives; however, as opposed to the UK, there is no single national film repository. The national moving image collection exists throughout many archives, museums, and libraries. Though there is not an official national film archive, the Library of Congress acts as a national film archive. The LoC has a large and varied collection of moving images that are important to the American

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<sup>1</sup> "History of the Archive." BFI.org.uk. Accessed Online. 24 March 2010.  
< <http://www.bfi.org.uk/nftva/work/history.html>>

film heritage, including all films that are submitted for copyright. Researchers, scholars, students, etc. can access these collections; however, the Library of Congress was created for the use of Congress, and was never intended to serve as national film archive, unlike the BFI's National Archive. The US also differs from the UK in terms of regional film archives. As stated previously, the UK has a network of public, government funded regional film archives. In the US, film archives are independent and are not mandated by the government. These archives have their own focus and institutional structure. Some examples of regional film archives in the US include Northeast Historic Film, Chicago Film Archive, Texas Archive of the Moving Image and San Francisco Bay Area Television Archives. However, much of the moving image material in the US is not in regional film archives, but instead is incorporated into larger collections within other institutions that have a regional mission. Institutions such as historical societies, state archives, museums, etc. may have a regional aspect as part of their mission and often include regionally significant moving image material. Though these institutions maintain and preserve aspects of America's moving image history, there are certainly gaps within regions.

The Yorkshire Film Archive is one of many regional film archives in the UK playing a role in preserving the moving image heritage for the public. Founded in 1988, the Yorkshire Film Archive's mission is to collect, preserve, and provide access to moving image material relating to the Yorkshire and the Humber geographical region in the northeast of England. The archive is located in the Fountains Learning Centre of York St. John University, which is in the center of York, and allows for the archive to be accessed more easily. Yorkshire Film Archive (YFA) was created as a charitable trust,

and in 2003 became a company limited by guarantee. A Board of Trustees governs the archive and meets quarterly to help with the development of the YFA as an organization<sup>2</sup>. The Board helps advocate for archive and is well represented with influential people in the moving image archiving world and the Yorkshire region, including the Chair - Colin Philpott (Head of the National Media Museum), Dr. Luke McKernan (Curator, Moving Image, British Library), Mike Pye (Sheffield City Council), and Professor Dianne Willcocks CBE (Vice Chancellor, York St John University). The YFA is supported by various organizations and funding, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, a subsidiary of Parliament's Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and the Yorkshire Forward, which is the regional development agency for the Yorkshire and Humber region. In addition to these agencies, YFA works with and is supported by York St John University and Screen Yorkshire, the regional film agency that promotes filming in the Yorkshire region. The archive currently has a staff of seven full time and three part-time employees, which includes Megan McCooley, the Moving Image Archivist, and Alex Southern, the Head of Learning. The staff looks after the archival care of the collections, cataloguing of the collections, access and education provision, administration, financial management and strategic development of the organization.

As a regional film archive, the Yorkshire Film Archive's mission and collection policy are tied directly to their geographical region. They collect moving image material that relates to the Yorkshire and Humber region. This includes any material that reflects the history, customs, or culture of the region, as well as material that was filmed in the region or that has a significant connection to the region. For instance, even if a film is

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<sup>2</sup> "About Us." Yorkshire Film Archive. Accessed online. 20 March 2010.  
<<http://www.yorkshirefilmarchive.com/view.aspx?id=10>>

not about the region and was not filmed in the region, but the filmmaker was from the region, YFA would still be interested in collection the material. The archive seeks to acquire all significant and unique material that fills in gaps within the collection based on location, subject matter, or time period in order to accurately represent the region's past and present. According to Megan McCooley, YFA's Moving Image Archivist, the archive conducts audits and projects every few years to help identify any gaps within the collection. These audits help the archive to tailor film searches around subject matter and ensure that the collection properly represents the history and people of the region<sup>3</sup>. Currently, the YFA has a collection of over 16,000 titles from as early as 1888 to the present day. The collection is acquired mainly through donations, and they encourage donations and deposits on their website. The collection ranges from professional to amateur and includes many home movies that offer a slice of the common life in York that would be overlooked by other institutions. Though there are some fictional works, including animation, within the collection, the majority of the collection is comprised of non-fiction moving image material. For instance, the YFA collection contains documentaries, advertising clips, newsreels, regional television news, educational material, and amateur footage. The wide variety of subject matter helps document all aspects of life in the Yorkshire region. There is footage that captures both rural and urban life, industry and agriculture, leisure activities and wartime in the region. All of the moving image material in the Yorkshire Film Archive helps document the rich history and culture of the Yorkshire and Umber region and provide an invaluable historical record.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Megan McCooley. Email. 15 April 2010.

In order to maintain the collection and help ensure its preservation, the Yorkshire Film Archive has four vaults to store their holdings. Three vaults contain film, including 8mm, Super-8mm, 9.5mm, 16mm, and 35 mm film. These vaults are kept at 10°C (50°F) and 42.5% RH to help conserve the film. The fourth vault, which is kept at 15°C (59°F) and 33% RH, is used to store their video and optical materials including VHS, BetaSP, U-Matic, Hi8, 1-inch, 2-inch, DigiBeta, DVCam, DVDs, etc. YFA also has some nitrate film in their collection, however, those materials are stored off-site in the British Film Institute's nitrate vaults. All regional archives have an agreement with BFI to store nitrate in BFI's specially equipped facilities and since YFA does not have the capabilities to properly store nitrate and for, they store any nitrate that they have or acquire with BFI for insurance, preservation, and safety purposes.

Preservation is another concern for the regional archive. For proper preservation, YFA strives to do as much film-to-film and video-to-film preservation. YFA transfers their film onto DigiBeta for access and as a digital preservation master. They are capable of conducting 8mm and Super-8 mm transfers in-house; however, all other film has to be outsourced. YFA is also able to do their own digital encoding for their online digital film archive and can edit digital files using Final Cut Pro<sup>4</sup>. However, like many of the regional films in the UK, as well as the archival world, funding is often a huge issue. Therefore, they rely heavily on a more passive preservation in terms of conservation for the overall collection, focusing on the storage conditions.

The main objective of the Yorkshire Film Archive is not only to preserve the moving image heritage of the Yorkshire region, but also to provide public access to these

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

collections. Access is vital to the archive's mission and the archive provides access in several different ways. Anyone who is interested in looking at YFA's holdings may visit the archive, but need to make an appointment beforehand. YFA has an online catalog; however, only a portion of their holdings is searchable. If someone is looking for something in particular, they are encouraged to contact one of the staff members at the archive. The archive has on-site facilities for viewing materials and there is no charge for viewing materials or any initial research and preparation for the use of archival footage. YFA provides the sale of archival footage for broadcasters, production companies, etc., for instance the ITV Yorkshire's show "The Way We Were," and BBC's documentary "Nation on Film." Occasionally there may be a film that is on deposit and though it is listed in their holdings, it might not be available for viewing; however, this is a very limited case. Throughout the year YFA provides access to footage for screenings and exhibitions. YFA usually participates in film festivals, exhibitions for galleries and museums, and also hold approximately fifty community screenings throughout the region each year.

The Yorkshire Film Archive also provides online access through their digital archive, Yorkshire Film Archive Online. This website, which was recently launched in the beginning of 2010, is a reflection of their mission for greater access. YFA online allows the global public to learn about the Yorkshire region and access over 50 hours worth of content through the result of funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Screen Yorkshire. The digital archive is a real achievement for the archive and though they only have a small portion of the collection available online, they are in the process of digitizing more for online access. This digital resource sets them apart from many of the

other regional film archives and truly conveys the importance of the moving image heritage, particularly for the Yorkshire region. The website is designed for users to browse through the collection, but allows users to search for specific clips. Users can browse by theme such as arts, wartime, family life, transport, etc., by decade spanning 1890s to 2000s, or by area, such as north Yorkshire or South Yorkshire. YFA online provides a wealth of information with each of the clips. Below the streaming of the clip there is the running time, the original format of the moving image, color (black & white, tinted, color, kodachrome, etc), sound (silent, sound, separate optical, separate magnetic, combined optical, etc), and credit information. The website also provides a description of the moving image content, as well as context information for each clip. There is also a feature called “Open Space,” which allows users to share information, comments, and images that relate to the film. Another feature of the website is the YFA Learning Zone for teachers and educators. This portion of the website allows educators to search for clips by subject (history, citizenship, geography, English, film/media, etc), decade, or theme. Once a clip is selected, the description and context information is provided, as well as suggested activities with the clip for the classroom is provided; however, this can only be accessed once you create a username and password. All of these feature on the website help provide more access to the archive’s collections and provide users with the information and tools to learn more about the moving image material and understand the importance of preserving them.

The Yorkshire Film Archive takes part in several national organizations to help preserve the moving image heritage in the UK. As part of the UK Film Archive Forum, YFA works with the other regional archives to help create a national film archive policy.

The Forum takes an interest in many of the archival aspects of the moving image, particularly in the preservation of nitrate film, acetate film, and videotape; the training of archivists, acquisitions policy, standards for archives, copyright, co-operation with film laboratories, and contacts with foreign archives, and strives to connect the regional archives in the common purpose of preserving the moving image<sup>5</sup>. Another initiative that the Yorkshire Film Archive is a part of is the Strategy for UK Screen Heritage. This program, which was started in June 2008, works across the different regions of the UK to identify and secure significant film collections, including collections that are housed in regional film archives. The goal of the program is access and the idea that the public is entitled to access, learn about and enjoy their rich screen heritage “wherever they live and wherever the materials are held<sup>6</sup>,” is the driving force behind Screen Heritage UK. YFA’s investment in the project will focus on the necessary preservation work for the collections already held by YFA, as well as working on a number of other significant collections housed elsewhere in the region.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these programs, YFA is also involved in other programs to help increase access to its collections. This includes a Union Catalogue, which is a searchable text based information, and Portrait of Britain, which is a content rich online resource, that helps create new opportunities for people to engage with the collections, and work with national and regional colleagues for the national access. All of these programs not only help access YFA’s collection, but also help ensure the access and preservation for all of the UK’s moving image heritage.

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<sup>5</sup> “History.” Film Archive Forum. Accessed Online. 2 April 2010.

< <http://www.bufvc.ac.uk/faf/aboutus.htm>>

<sup>6</sup> “Screen Heritage UK Programme Overview.” BFI. Accessed Online. 21 April 2010.

<[http://www.bfi.org.uk/about/policy/pdf/shuk\\_programme\\_overview\\_09.pdf](http://www.bfi.org.uk/about/policy/pdf/shuk_programme_overview_09.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> “Screen Heritage UK.” Yorkshire Film Archive Background Information. Accessed Online. 21 April 2010.

As a film archive in the UK, the Yorkshire Film Archive is able to work alongside a network of archives to protect Yorkshire's and the UK's rich moving image heritage. American film archives do not have the same network as the UK, and as a result are much more independent. One example of an American regional film archive is Northeast Historic Film. NHF collects, preserves, and provides access to the moving image history of the northern New England region, including Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont. The archive was founded in 1986 in Bucksport, Maine and is an independent non-profit organization, which has received funding through independent organizations and agencies such as the Maine Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Film Preservation Foundation. NHF's collection includes over 28,000 items, which ranges from 1901 to the present day. The collection is comprised of moving image materials related to the northern New England region by location, content, filmmaker, or other significant connection, but will accept unique or significant material that is endangered of being damaged or lost. The materials include film formats such as 8mm, Super-8mm, 9.5mm, 16mm, 28mm, 35mm, as well as analog and digital video formats. A portion of their holdings is listed in NHF's online catalog, but there is no online access to the materials. In addition to access available on-site at the archive, Northeast Historic Film runs a community cinema in the 1916 Alamo Theatre that has screenings open to the public.

NHF's primary focus is conservation and preservation, which is reflected through the Northeast Historic Film Conservation Center. The new facility provides cold storage for motion picture, photographic film, magnetic, and other media. The building has a 12,000 cubic foot capacity and stores materials on three temperature and humidity

controlled floors. Along with NHF's collections, the storage facility holds the moving image collections of the Maine State Archives, the Harvard Film Archives, and the National center for Jewish Film at Brandeis. Other organizations or individuals can rent space to store their moving image collection if they do not have the facilities to properly conserve their materials. NHF is involved in the community's moving image heritage, but also plays a role in the national and global moving image history. While both archives are concerned with moving images of a specific geographical region, they have slightly different priorities. Both archives view preservation and access as important for the moving image heritage; however, YFA is concerned more with access, while NHF is slightly more concerned with preservation. Also, though both are independent archives, YFA has government funding and a network of regional film archive. Comparing the Yorkshire Film Archive to Northeast Historic Film helps create an understanding of the similarities and differences of UK and US film archives.

Yorkshire Film Archive is a strong example of how regional film archives are fundamental in preserving the moving image. The United Kingdom's regional film archive infrastructure ensures the preservation of the nation's rich moving image heritage and its historic significance. Regional film archives help create and preserve the historical record that moving images document. Archives such as the Yorkshire Film Archive, which makes preservation and accession its mission, ensures that this history is protected and available to the public.