

MILESTONE



ELECTRIC EDWARDIANS

THE FILMS OF MITCHELL & KENYON

PRESS KIT

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Electric Edwardians The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon



Panoramic View of the Morecambe Sea Front (1901)

***Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon* is a special compilation of highlights from the Collection**

Between 1900—1913 two early film-makers from Blackburn, Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, were commissioned by touring showmen to film ordinary people at work and play. Shot mostly in the North of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, they were then screened by the showmen at town halls, village fetes and local fairs, advertised as local films for local people.

Most of Mitchell & Kenyon's films were lost when the business closed in the 1920s, but over 800 original nitrate negatives were rediscovered in the pair's original shop in Blackburn in 1994. Handed to the British Film Institute (*bfi*) for restoration in 2000, the Collection has been painstakingly restored and researched by the *bfi* National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA), in partnership with the University of Sheffield's National Fairground Archive.

Today we are able to see an unparalleled visual record of life as it was in Edwardian Britain. Audiences will be able to experience the world of their great grandparents as never before.

This ranks as the most exciting film discovery of recent times: in order to bring the collection to life and show it to a whole new generation, the *bfi* has created a program of highlights of the films available for cinema hire across the country —*Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon*.

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Starting in March 2005, the program lasts for approximately 90 minutes (including screening plus live presentation) and covers a range of subjects - Youth & Education, Workers, High Days and Holidays, People and Places, and there will be additional material available with specific local interest. We can see children taking part in parades and processions and young lads playing up in front of the cameras as they leave the mill where they work. There are remarkable images of coal miners leaving the pithead in Pendlebury and emigrants boarding a ship at Liverpool bound for the United States. We can take a tram ride into Halifax or a walk along the promenade at Morecambe. The program even contains the earliest surviving footage of Manchester United playing in its first season, 1902, having just changed its name from Newton Heath.

Available in multiple formats including HD, the program features a specially commissioned musical score written and performed by *In the Nursery*, a Sheffield-based musical project formed by twin brothers Klive and Nigel Humberstone. *In the Nursery*'s musical history spans more than two decades and over two dozen albums released since 1981. They have spent the last eight years developing their Optical Music Series — new scores for classic silent films.

Electric Edwardians - program content

(71 mins)

Youth and Education

- Mitchell & Kenyon 266:** Audley Range School, Blackburn (c 1904)
Mitchell & Kenyon 269: Special March Past of St Joseph s Scholars and Special Parade of St Matthew s Pupils, Blackburn (1905)
Mitchell & Kenyon 248: Morecambe Church Lads Brigade at Drill (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 525: University Procession on Degree Day, Birmingham (1901)

Workers

- Mitchell & Kenyon 28:** Messrs Lumb and Co Leaving the Works, Huddersfield (1900)
Mitchell & Kenyon 58: Pendlebury Colliery (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 35: 20,000 Employees Entering Lord Armstrong s Elswick Works, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1900)
Mitchell & Kenyon 59: Alfred Butterworth and Sons, Glebe Mills, Hollinwood (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 602: Parkgate Iron and Steel Co., Rotherham (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 731: North Sea Fisheries, North Shields (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 235: Cunard Vessel at Liverpool (c 1901)

High Days and Holidays

- Mitchell & Kenyon 291:** Whitsuntide Fair at Preston (1906)
Mitchell & Kenyon 173: Manchester Band of Hope Procession (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 200: Blackpool Victoria Pier (1904)
Mitchell & Kenyon 553: Leeds Athletic and Cycling Club Carnival (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 155: Dewsbury v Manningham (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 772: Sedgwick's Bioscope Show Front (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 320: The Great Local Derby: Accrington v Church Cricket Match (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 617: Halifax Catholic Procession (c 1905)
Mitchell & Kenyon 327: Burnley v Manchester United (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 606: Sheffield United v Bury (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 286: Preston Egg Rolling (c 1901)

People and Places

- Mitchell & Kenyon 175:** Living Wigan (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 614: Tram Ride into Halifax (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 168: Electric Tram Rides from Forster Square, Bradford (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 186: Jamaica Street, Glasgow (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 183: Ride on the Tramcar through Belfast (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 726: Wexford Bull Ring (1902)
Mitchell & Kenyon 172: Manchester Street Scene (1901)
Mitchell & Kenyon 246: Panoramic View of the Morecambe Sea Front (1901)

PRESS RELEASE

14 January 2005

Ref: 05/01

NATIONAL FILM TREASURE TROVE REVEALED

bfi completes £1 million restoration of the last great film find – The Mitchell & Kenyon Collection

The British Film Institute (*bfi*) reveals what is probably the greatest film find of modern times – the film equivalent of Tutankhamen's treasure and which is set to rewrite film history.

Following a four-year painstaking and intricate restoration project costing almost £1 million, the *bfi* officially launched the *Mitchell & Kenyon* Collection at a National Gala film screening and reception in Blackburn, Lancashire. This historic collection of rediscovered films from the turn of the last century is being celebrated with a national cinema tour, an accompanying book, and a deluxe DVD release.

The event acknowledges the previously unrecognized contribution made to the earliest beginnings of the British film industry by Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, two Blackburn-based entrepreneurs. The pair set up in business together in 1897 to make films of ordinary, everyday people going about their lives in Edwardian Britain. Following the recent discovery of a huge collection of their films, only now are we able to see the true extent of their work and acknowledge Mitchell & Kenyon as pioneers in the history of early film-making in Britain.

Among the scenes and films being shown are:

- Whitsuntide Fair at Preston (1906)
- Pendlebury Colliery (1901)
- Blackpool Victoria Pier (1904)
- Burnley v Manchester United (1902)

Speaking ahead of the launch, *bfi* Director Amanda Nevill said:

“This is an incredibly exciting and significant film discovery and we are immensely lucky to have such a clear, informative and entertaining visual record of life in Edwardian times.

After four years of meticulous, expensive and often difficult restoration and research, we are thrilled to be able to now show publicly many of the films and provide such a rich contextual account. Everyone at the *bfi* is delighted that this important part of early film history has been saved for the nation and for future generations.”

Between 1897 and 1913 Mitchell & Kenyon were commissioned by travelling fairground showmen to make films of ordinary people going about their lives. Shot mostly across the north of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales and in the days before purpose-built cinemas had emerged, these films were shown to audiences at fairgrounds, village fetes and in town halls. They were advertised as ‘local films for local people’ and attracted big audiences of people eager to see themselves and their family and friends on screen – for most a completely new experience. It was a lucrative business and for many film and social historians Mitchell & Kenyon are regarded as the equivalent of Internet entrepreneurs of their time.

Most of the films made by the pair were ‘lost’ when their business folded in the 1920’s. It was 70 years later, in 1994 that their original shop in Blackburn was being renovated and over 800 original nitrate film negatives were discovered languishing in a number of sealed metal barrels in the basement. Local film historian, Peter Worden, recognised their significance and brought them to the *bfi* for restoration, making them publicly available.

During the restoration of the films, the University of Sheffield’s National Fairground Archive worked with the *bfi* and with a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, to research the films and gather historical and contextual information. What the researchers found is a truly remarkable collection of images largely unseen for a century and which provide an unparalleled visual record of everyday life in Edwardian Britain.

There are remarkable scenes of workers leaving factories, people working in mills and at mine heads, school children exercising, families promenading by

the seaside, crowds watching football matches, town processions and parades and many other social gatherings.

The films clearly show us the clothing trends of the day and we can start to question what brought about such a stark shift in styles and fashions as Britain entered the First World War. We are able to see the transition from primarily horse-drawn vehicles to motorised trams and trolley buses and how this affected the behaviour of pedestrians on the streets.

There is much of interest in the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection to archivists and historians as they watch moving images of emigrants leaving the Liverpool dock-side bound for New York or the women following the fishing fleet and preparing the day's catch for market. There is even the earliest surviving footage of a football match between Manchester United, in its first season following its change of name from Newton Heath, playing Burnley. The film was never shown in Burnley as the local side lost 2- nil.

From February 2005 Milestone will be bringing the Mitchell & Kenyon films to audiences in towns and cities across the USA. A special compilation - *Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon* – will present highlights from the Collection. The program features a specially commissioned score from *In The Nursery*, a Sheffield-based musical project, which blends electronica with classical arrangements and orchestral overtones that bring the films to life. Milestone will release a special DVD of the compilation later in 2005.

A book, *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film* – has been published by *bfi* Publishing. It contains a number of essays from leading historians and scholars who provide an engaging narrative on the discovery of the films, their restoration and the historical research.

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Notes to Editors

The British Film Institute

The British Film Institute's purpose is to champion moving image culture in all its richness and diversity across the UK, for the benefit of as wide an audience as possible, and to create and encourage debate. It does this by developing opportunities for all UK citizens to engage with

film, TV and media heritage and culture. The *bfi* also works closely with national and regional partners to provide a focus for the diversity of UK moving image culture, while playing a key role in influencing the national and international agenda.

Established in 1933, the *bfi* provides a wide range of services, including: *bfi* National Film Theatre (NFT), *bfi* London IMAX Cinema (Britain's largest screen), *bfi* National Library (the world's leading specialist film & television library), *bfi* National Film & Television Archive (one of the world's oldest and largest culturally significant film & TV archives), *bfi* London Film Festival, *bfi* London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival, the renowned *bfi* DVD & Video catalogue of world and historic cinema, a wide range of award-winning *bfi* publications and *bfi* education materials, film footage, film stills, and research services for the commercial media industry, the highly-respected *Sight & Sound* film magazine.

The National Fairground Archive

The National Fairground Archive (NFA) was inaugurated by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield in 1994, with the support of the Showmen's Guild of Great Britain and the Fairground Association of Great Britain. Housed in the Main Library, it is a unique collection of photographic, printed, manuscript and audiovisual material covering all aspects of the culture of travelling showpeople, their organisation as a community, their social history and everyday life; and the artefacts and machinery of fairgrounds.

The NFA collections are continuing to grow: there are now over 80,000 images in the photographic collection, in addition to audio and video material, journals and magazines, and nearly 3,000 monographs. The collection also includes a unique body of fairground ephemera (programs, handbills, posters, charters and proclamations, plans and drawings).

The NFA represents an important part of the cultural heritage of the nation. It is a primary resource of rich potential for research at every level; it provides a new and exciting source of teaching material for primary and secondary education, and provides access to a wealth of popular cultural history both for the Fairground enthusiast and for the public at large.

Milestone Film & Video

Winner: January 9, 2005
Special Award from the New York Film Critic's Circle
in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films.

Milestone enters its fifteenth year of operation with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's rediscovery, restoration and distribution of such important films as Mikhail Kalatozov's *I am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company has long occupied a position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the industry. In 1995 Milestone received a Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as the 1999 "Indie Distributor of the Year." On January 2, 2004, the National Society of Film Critics awarded Milestone Film & Video their prestigious Film Heritage award. And the kudos continue: in December 2004, the International Film Seminars awarded Milestone its prestigious Leo Award, named for indie distribution pioneer Leo Dratfield, and the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films."

When Amy Heller and Dennis Doros first started Milestone in 1990 their goals were to find and release the best films of the past *and* the present. The company's US premieres have included such remarkable new films as Manoel de Oliveira's *I'm Going Home*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, Yoichi Higashi's *Village of Dreams*, Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*, Tareque Masud's *The Clay Bird*, and Jerzy Stuhr's *The Big Animal*.

Milestone has released a wide range of classics in sparkling restorations, including: Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*, Lotte Reiniger's animation masterpiece, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World*, Jane Campion's *Two Friends*, Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road*, Conrad Rooks' *Siddhartha*, Anthony Howarth's *People of the Wind*, and Rolando Klein's *Chac*. Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. The company premiered a new restoration of E.A. Dupont's *Piccadilly* — starring the bewitching Anna May Wong — at the 2003 New York Film Festival. Such stellar contemporary filmmakers as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Woody Allen, Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman have co-presented important Milestone restorations.

Milestone has established strong working relationships with some of the world's great film archives, including the British Film Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, George Eastman House, Library of Congress, Nederlands Filmmuseum and Norsk Filminstitut. In 2000, Milestone's 10th Anniversary Retrospective was shown in venues nationwide and Milestone raised and donated \$20,000 from these screenings to four archives in the United States and England.

In addition to the company's strong presence in art-house film distribution, Milestone has built a highly praised video/DVD collection. Most of these DVDs have been released

on Image Entertainment's "The Milestone Collection" label and have earned the company new accolades. Milestone's video-only releases have included such important silent restorations as: *Eternal Love*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Blot*, *La Terre*, *It*, *Simba*, *The Chess Player*, *Silent Shakespeare*, *Mad Love: The Films of Evgenii Bauer*, *Early Russian Cinema* (a 10-volume compilation), and *The Cook & Other Treasures*.

Milestone also released on DVD four great animation collections: *John Canemaker: Marching to a Different Toon*, *Cut-Up: The Films of Grant Munro*, *Norman McLaren: The Collector's Edition*, and *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*. Other video premieres have explored the stories of four remarkable American women: *Millay at Steepletop*, *Captured on Film: The True Story of Marion Davies*, *Without Lying Down* (about screenwriter Frances Marion) and *Mary Pickford: A Life on Film*. Some of the company's other classic films on video include *With Byrd at the South Pole*, *The Bat Whispers*, *Tonight or Never*, *The Gay Desperado*, and *Night Tide*. Milestone's independent docs on video include *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China*, *Shackleton's Boat Journey*, and Alan Berliner's documentary trilogy, *Family Album*, *Nobody's Business* and *Intimate Stranger*.

Milestone has many features lined up for 2005 for theatrical, video and television release. Included are Marcel Ophuls' *The Troubles We've Seen*, *Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon*, *Cut to the Chase: The Charley Chase Classic Comedy Collection* (15 short films, 6 hours), *The Harold Lloyd Collection* (13 short and feature films, 5 hours), *The Crossing* (directed by Yoichi Higashi), *The Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack Collection* with *In Search of Kong* (directed by Serge Viallet) and newly remastered versions of *Grass* and *Chang*, The films of Charles Burnett including *Killer of Sheep* and *My Brother's Wedding*, *Nosferatu* (directed by F.W. Murnau with a score by James Bernard), *The Olive Thomas Collection*, *Uttara* (directed by Buddhadeb Dasgupta) and *Oporto of My Childhood* (directed by Manoel de Oliveira).

The Library of Congress has selected eight Milestone films for its prestigious National Film Registry: Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (to be released in 2005), *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis' *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *It*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and *Grass*.

In 2003, Nadja Tennstedt joined the company as director of international sales.

"Since its birth the Milestone Film & Video Co. has steadily become the industry's foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality."

— William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"Milestone Film & Video is an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade"

— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

The Mitchell & Kenyon Collection

Historical Significance



- In recognising the financial potential of the still-new art of film-making, Mitchell & Kenyon were able to create a lucrative business out of taking commissions from travelling fairground showmen to film ordinary people going about their lives. These showmen would then screen the films at fairgrounds, town halls and other venues to a paying audience. In this respect Mitchell & Kenyon can be regarded as the Internet entrepreneurs of the day
- Until some of their the films were found in 1994, Mitchell & Kenyon had been regarded as little more than a regional film company operating in the north of England. Not much had been written about them or their contribution to the British film industry and they were mostly known for their surviving films of Boer War reconstructions
- The curatorial process undertaken by the *bfi* and the University of Sheffield's National Fairground Archive of acquiring, preserving, restoring, researching, documenting and making available over 800 early non-fiction films made by Mitchell and Kenyon allows us to rewrite the history of early film-making
- This Collection has brought to the fore the forgotten role of the itinerant exhibitors and re-evaluated the innovative role they played in the development of film screening before the advent of cinema
- Many newspapers at the time would document social gatherings such as parades, street celebrations, demonstrations, religious processions and so on but only now can we get a true sense of what those were like - the variety of costumes, the banners, how they were policed, the reactions of onlookers

- There is clear evidence from the films of the role women played in the workplace and just how many were at work in those days. We see that many worked in hard jobs such as in mines — albeit at the surface
- Simply from the differences in dress it is possible to see white-collar workers and their families enjoying the views and sea-air alongside more squarely working classes in scenes of the waterfront at Blackpool — while some of the images of Morecambe show crowds of people not so well-dressed — both of which challenge the conventional stereotyping of both resorts
- Many sporting events of the day were captured and the collection of films contains the earliest known footage of the football team formerly known as Newton Heath playing its first season as Manchester United. The match was against Burnley, played in December 1902 and Manchester United won 2:nil
- Street-scenes reveal a much slower pace of life compared to more modern times — not surprisingly, but the films do give us a sense of how many people there were on the streets and the apparent relaxed behaviour as they would stop to talk in the middle of the road while horse-drawn vehicles and pedal cycles weaved around them
- Many celebrities of the time were captured on film — eg Lord Kitchener, their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, Prince Henry of Prussia, Robert Baden-Powell, General Buller and Lord Roberts .both leading military figures. One film in particular shows the hero s welcome home for a Boer war veteran - Private Ward, VC

The Mitchell & Kenyon Collection

Key Dates



- 1897 Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon set up in business in Blackburn as film-makers. They were commissioned by travelling fairground managers to film ordinary people going about their lives. These films were later screened at fairgrounds and at town halls and other venues, advertised as local films for local people, and people would flock to pay to see themselves on film — a unique experience
- 1900-1913 During this period hundreds of films were made outside places of work, factories, schools and of street scenes and people at leisure, shot mostly across the north of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales
- 1922 The business was wound up and many films were subsequently lost or forgotten about
- 1994 The original shop was refurbished and over 800 original nitrate film negatives were found by builders in three metal containers. They were eventually passed to Blackburn-based historian, Peter Worden, who recognised their significance and conserved them for preservation, sealing them in airtight containers and storing them in a chest freezer pending restoration

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- 2000 Peter Worden brought the films to the British Film Institute for restoration and to be saved for the nation.
- Working with the University of Sheffield's National Fairground Archive the *bfi* set about restoring and preserving the collection of films, and with a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Board the films were researched and contextualised
- 2004 The restoration, research and cataloguing process is completed
- The *bfi* book — *The Lost World of Mitchell & Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film* is published, exploring the collection and its significance
- 2005 January sees a Gala screening event to mark the completion of the restoration and to launch the book, a DVD release (available spring 2005) called *Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell & Kenyon* and a national cinema tour to screen highlights from the collection

The Mitchell & Kenyon Collection

Media Quotes

"Watching these films, I felt that history had been enlarged and one of its divisions abolished – that between the living and the long dead." — **Ian Jack, The Guardian**

"Seen today, the effect of Mitchell & Kenyon's short films is to plunge the viewer directly into the street life of Edwardian Britain, with all its raw and poignant energy.....it is both delightful and faintly eerie to watch them." – **Sunday Telegraph Magazine**

"Last night I watched these images three dimensionally and a whole new side to our ancestors became clear....we watched in awe."—**Lancashire Evening Telegraph**

"Gloriously, time-travellingly real — **The Observer**

"A startling, vivid portrait of working class life a century ago"—**The Times**

"These works provide us with a hitherto unimagined insight into Edwardian life in this country"—**The Independent**

"Invaluable social history documents"—**Financial Times**

"Teasing slivers of social history"—**Daily Telegraph**

"a fascinating window on long-lost boating days, street parades and Sunday promenades — **Daily Mail**

"Each frame of this archive gives us fresh insights and a poignant remembrance of things past...the clarity of image given the age of the film is startling."—**BBC 10 o'clock News**

"Imagine you could travel back in time to find yourself at a turn of the century coal mine, on the bridge of a Cunard liner at Liverpool, or promenading at Morecambe Bay when the resort was at the height of sophistication. The British Film Institute has made it possible."—**Channel 4 News**

Prepare to be astonished — **Sight and Sound**

"Almost hypnotic in its magical appeal" – **Manchester Evening News**

Guardian

Friday 7 January 2005

The lost world

It is the film equivalent of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb - a century ago, two entrepreneurs toured Britain capturing working-class life on camera. **Ian Jack** reveals how their archive has been brought back to life.

One day last month I was lucky enough to sit in a small cinema at the British Film Institute in London and watch a series of short films, none more than a few minutes long and all of them about 100 years old. Only one of them contained people who might have been actors. Most of them showed the industrial working class of northern England, with occasional forays north to Scotland, west to Wales and Ireland, and south to the Midlands. This was working Britain at its apogee as the world's supreme imperial and industrial power, brought alive in black-and-white pictures that were wonderfully clear and sharp, unscratched and unfogged. Watching them was to see generations of people, known to us mainly through still and stiff family photographs, become more fully human. They walked, they ran, they clowned at the camera or self-consciously ignored it. There was a lot of humour and confidence in them. Some of these people - the old woman weaver, a white-bearded mechanic - must have been born before 1850. They might remember the Crimean war. Now they were walking towards me, sometimes staring boldly at me, on a screen in central London in late 2004.

These pictures were moving in another sense. It is hard to put a finger on why, though when a selection of them is shown later this month on BBC2 and at the National Film Theatre I am certain that their audience will be as affected as everyone else who has seen them so far. It isn't as though we don't know that our Victorian and Edwardian ancestors walked and ran and laughed, or worked in mills, or took the tram, or bled when pricked. Some of us thought we knew these things quite vividly. In my own case, I briefly shared a bedroom (and, come to think of it, a bed) with a grandfather who was born in 1874 and could recall the storm in Glasgow that, further east, blew down the Tay Bridge; I remember his long underwear and his pipe, which was tapped out only before he made the decision to sleep. But even though I knew this man, and as child literally rubbed up against him, he was for me a relic. In one of these films, he would be different: a young man among other young men and women, a lively part of the age that shaped him, working in a bleachworks, stepping out into the 20th century, innocent of all the wonder and horror it would eventually contain. Sitting in the BFI's cinema, I felt that history had suddenly been enlarged and one of its divisions abolished, that between the living and the long dead.

Why has this feeling been so delayed? Where have the films been until now? The answers lie in a remarkable story of preservation, discovery and restoration that to British film history is a near (if not parallel) equivalent to the finding of Tutankhamen's tomb or the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1994, workmen stripping out an empty shop at 40 Northgate, Blackburn, Lancashire, went down to the cellar and discovered three large metal drums, like big rusting milk churns, which turned out to contain more than 800 rolls of nitrate film. A cinephile and film historian, Peter Worden, knew of the site as the old studios of two Blackburn men, Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, who had made and processed films there until 1913.

Worden had kept a watchful eye on the shop in case anything was discovered inside it. He arranged for the metal drums to be delivered to him - the alternative destination was the skip - and transferred their contents to 17 plastic food containers, the size of family ice-cream tubs, and stored them in a chest freezer. To preserve and restore the films proved beyond Worden's means. The BFI took them over as the Mitchell and Kenyon collection in 2000 and then began their painstaking restoration at its laboratories in Berkhamsted.

Most were made between 1900 and 1907, but the age of the films is not in itself the most significant thing. The Lumi re brothers, generally accepted as the founders of cinema, showed their first film to a paying audience in Paris in 1895 and in London the next year. By the late 1890s several British film-makers were at work and several of their films survive - short bursts of sea breaking on rocks, trains at speed, the procession at Queen's Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897. Nor, when their hoard was discovered in 1994, were Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon unknown. Their films of the Boer war, depicting British bravery and Boer depravity, had a minor celebrity as early examples of cinematic propaganda and fakery (they were shot entirely in the Lancashire countryside). To the film historian, what was exciting about the discovery was its size - translated to DVD or video, the films take up to 28 hours of viewing time - and its technical quality. The reels were the original negatives, kept in good condition for most of the century in the cool of the cellar. Their positives, the film actually projected on to the screen, would have been damaged by the wear and tear of machinery, the heat of the electrics, the carelessness of the operator.

The images, then, have a freshness and clarity, but that (to the film historian or otherwise) is only part of their appeal. What they show is a world now lost to us: the busy world of northern Britain in its manufacturing, mining heyday; the world that, among other things, created and sustained this newspaper as the Manchester Guardian. Not until the 1930s and the British documentary movement did film-makers pay it so much attention again, this time as a subject for moral concern because it had then begun its slow collapse.

In Mitchell and Kenyon's films you can see it as an independent civilisation, glorying in its new recreations and enjoyments such as electric trams, professional sport, street parades and pageants, and seaside holidays. There are films of 32 northern soccer matches, and of 18 rugby games played by professional teams in the newly-founded Northern Union (later the Rugby League) which broke from the amateur Rugby Football Union in 1895. You can see the new electric trams in Halifax, Lytham and Accrington, Catholic and temperance processions in the streets of Manchester, a flotilla of destroyers moving up the Manchester Ship Canal, the crowded piers at Blackpool and Morecambe. You see horses pulling people and goods - stables in British towns then contained 1.7 million of them. You see many factory chimneys, smoking.

Most of all, you see people. Very few of them, no matter how poor, are bareheaded: the men wear flat caps, bowlers, straw boaters, trilbies, toppers, the women shawls or floral hats. Waistcoats are everywhere, as are moustaches and mufflers, pipes and cigarettes. Tobacco smoke drifts close to the camera, coal smoke further off. Nobody is fat. Many have bad teeth; people have a way of smiling which manages not to reveal them. Perhaps this technique has been forgotten; a particular male stance afforded by the waistcoat - the thumbs in its pockets - has also disappeared.

The streets of Lancashire look impossibly crowded and surging, and probably they were much more so then than now. But there is another reason for this vibrancy: the film-maker's presence. Mitchell and Kenyon were businessmen and only by accident social documentarists. They made three kinds of film: the fake (as in their Boer war films), the fictional (as in *Diving Lucy* of 1903, billed in the US, improbably for a film made in a Lancashire public park, as "the hit British comedy of the year"); and "actualities". The last, also known as "local topicals", were their bread and butter, and worked on the principle then (and still) well-known to local newspapers: the more names of local citizens that appeared in the paper - as prize-winning scholars, Sunday school excursionists, speech-making councillors - the more the paper sold to people who liked to see they had been noticed.

So it was with the local topicals, which were mainly commissioned from Mitchell and Kenyon by showmen and fairground owners who had begun to see the potential of cinema shows in tents and civic halls (there were as yet no cinemas). People would come to watch the huge novelty of their appearance on film; the more people Mitchell and Kenyon could capture in the frame, the larger the showman's audience, the more handsome the profit. The countryside and the market town were no good for this. A large and dense population such as industrial Lancashire's was ideal. But where could the largest press of people be found - people moving quickly, one face replaced by another, streaming through a space no wider than the lens on a

fixed camera could accommodate, as many people within a one-minute film as would, with their friends and relations, make a decent audience at the screening a few nights later?

The solution was the factory gate, but not the factory gate at clocking-on time, when workers arrived too randomly and at the wrong angle, but when their shift was over and they surged out, free and quick, and straight towards a camera being hand-turned by a man behind a tripod, against which a sign might be mounted: "Come and see yourself as others see you, seven o'clock pm at the Drill Hall in Jessop Street". And there they would go and, according to contemporary accounts, point to themselves on the screen and shout out, tickled by the strangeness of it all.

Mitchell and Kenyon didn't invent this genre, "the factory-gate film", which is as old as film itself. The film shown by the Lumi re Brothers to their first paying audience in 1895 was called *Sortie de l'Usine*, one of three shot outside their factory gates in Lyon, not to make money from their workforce but to demonstrate to a Paris audience how a film could capture human movement. Nor were Mitchell and Kenyon its only British practitioners. In southern England, the pioneering film-maker, Cecil Hepworth, announced in his promotional literature that: "A film showing workers leaving a factory will gain far greater popularity in the town where it was taken than the most exciting picture ever produced. The workers come in hundreds, with all their friends and relations, and the film more than pays for itself the first night." The Blackburn men, however, were in the right place at the right time. In 1900, Lancashire employed 600,000 men, women, and children in its cotton spinning and weaving factories and another 100,000 in the cloth finishing trades. More than 60% of cotton goods traded internationally were made in Lancashire, and they accounted for a quarter of British exports by value. Blackburn's own speciality was the dhoti, the traditional Indian loincloth, many millions of which were shipped over to Bombay and Calcutta. The mills were on the film-makers' doorstep, and if these mills were ever exhausted as audience providers, then it was easy to move on to collieries, engineering shops and ironworks, or to take the train across to the worsted factories of Yorkshire, or further afield to the great shipyards on the Tyne, or in Barrow or Greenock. In an office at the BFI they have a map of Britain on the wall, with pins to mark the hundreds of Mitchell and Kenyon's known locations; very few pins south of Birmingham and then a dense spread across the Pennines to the north: Darwen, Chorley, Ormerod's Mill in Bolton, Pendelebury Colliery, Parkgate Ironworks, Platts of Oldham, Haslam's Ltd of Colne.

In the Parkgate film, a young man does a rather modern thing and gives a V sign to the cameraman. In another film entitled "20,000 Employees entering Lord Armstrong's Elswick Works", made on Tyneside in 1900, we see a grave crowd of men moving steadily down a slope towards the camera, ready to begin a day's work in the yard that built battleships for the

Japanese. It lasts for two minutes and 34 seconds, the camera angle unchanged: a sea of faces moving forward, replenished from behind, like something out of Eisenstein. Many other

films have the crowd controller in shot, sometimes James Kenyon and sometimes the showman who commissioned the film. Their good suits separate them from the crowd and they can be seen gesticulating, urging their subjects to move past the camera rather than stand and stare at it, or staging a mock fight or teasing a woman - anything to give the film animation and interest. In this way, and unlike many documentaries since, their version of reality is strikingly honest. You can see the human intervention in it.

The people leaving their factories in these films look happy enough and yet, despite the wealth they created, many of them lived in ill-health and poverty - a scandal that was beginning to rumble through Britain in the same years that the films were made. The Boer war had brought certain facts to light. Four out of 10 young men offering themselves as recruits to the British army had to be rejected because their bodies weren't up to the job. They had bad teeth, weak hearts, poor sight and hearing, physical deformities of all kinds. Most obviously, they were too short: in 1901, the infantry had to reduce the minimum height for recruits to 5ft from 5ft 3ins (it had already been lowered from 5ft 6ins in 1883).

A government committee (the frankly-named Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration) was set up and reported in 1904. It found that boys of 10 to 12 at council schools were, on average, five inches shorter than those at private schools; that working-class girls, according to the evidence of a factory inspector, exhibited "the same shortness of stature, the same miserable development, the same sallow cheeks and [decayed] teeth". It was established that breast-feeding was rapidly declining, partly because increasing numbers of new mothers went out to work in the factories, but also because many mothers were simply not healthy enough to provide milk. Chronic digestive troubles, bad teeth, anaemia, and "general debility" were almost universal among working-class women. Instead of milk from the breast, mothers gave their infants the cheapest food they could buy, which was usually sweetened condensed skimmed milk - high in sugar and devoid of fats and thus an excellent diet to promote rickets. The very poorest mothers substituted a mixture of flour and water, which was milk-like only in appearance. In the county of London - and the same was surely true in the northern cities - more than one in every five children did not live beyond infancy.

All this began to change well before the first world war, but too late for the boys and girls leaving Ormerod's mill in 1900. Think of them when you see these films and of what that war held for them. Think also of the fate of Blackburn and its dependence on the imperial dhoti trade. India imposed cotton tariffs in the early 1920s. JB Priestley visited Blackburn early in the next decade, and wrote: "The tragic word around [Blackburn], I soon discovered, is dhotie.

It is the forgotten Open Sesame... This fabric was manufactured in the town and the surrounding district on a scale equal to the needs of the gigantic Indian population. So colossal was the output that Blackburn was the greatest weaving town in the world. It clothed

the whole vast mad peninsula. Millions and millions of yards of dhotie cloth went streaming out of this valley. That trade is almost finished."

The terms of international trade were to blame. Lancashire, Priestley concluded, was "learning a lot about this queer interdependence of things". Every factory town in the Mitchell and Kenyon films has since learned the same lesson. The people who appear in them, however poor and unhealthy, held the key to Britain's industrial importance to the world. Which among them could have realised that that superb position was as temporary as life itself?