

# An Archival Film Collection in the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge

MARY THATCHER

## General History and background of the Archive Collection

The Centre of South Asian Studies in the University of Cambridge was established as a distinct institution in May 1964 in accordance with recommendations of the Hayter Report, to promote teaching and research in South Asia (i.e. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka [formerly Ceylon], Burma, Afghanistan and Nepal) to publish the result of research work done, and to co-operate with outside bodies in the encouragement of research in South Asian Studies.

The Centre is controlled by an inter-Faculty Committee of Management; its Director is Mr. B. H. Farmer. The Centre holds seminars and arranges lectures on political, economic, social, historical and agricultural problems in South Asia, and has a reference library and union catalogue of holdings in South Asia in the University. It sponsors a series of monographs, Cambridge South Asian Studies (published by the Cambridge University Press) and Bibliographies (published by Mansell & Co.). The staff includes a graduate assistant (engaged in research) and a bibliographer. The Centre provides the base for two inter-disciplinary and international research projects, the South Asian Dry Zone Project and the Project on Agrarian Change.

In 1966 the Committee of Management launched the preliminary and exploratory phase of an archive project which it had been considering for some time. The Committee believed that there were still in existence, papers, diaries, letters, photographs, films, etc., written or collected by those who served and lived in South Asia, which were capable of throwing light on economic, social and political conditions during the period of British rule in the former Indian Empire and Ceylon. Similar original sources were already being collected by the Colonial Records Project in Oxford for the Colonial World excluding the former Indian Empire.

Accordingly in February 1967, with a grant from the Smuts Memorial Fund, the Committee launched a pilot project under Sir Arthur Dash, C.I.E., who agreed to circulate the members of the Indian Civil Service Pensioners' Association to discover whether the response to an appeal for papers would warrant seeking for funds to begin the collection proper of the Archive.

The response was such that the Committee considered it worth while to begin the collection proper, and with a generous grant from the Nuffield Foundation to cover three years, serious collection started in May 1967.

In October 1973, the first handlist of the contents of the Archive Collection was published by Mansell as Cambridge South Asian Archive: Records of the British period in South Asia relating to India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, Nepal and Afghanistan, held in the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, compiled and edited by Mary Thatcher. It lists 238 written collections, 11 film collections (consisting of 134 films) and 104 tape recordings made in India. Since June 1972, which was the date when active collecting ceased prior to publication, 69 further collections have been received and catalogued, and there remain about 25 to be catalogued and more to be collected from donors. A further 25 tape-recordings have been made by Mr. Uma Shanker in India and he has about thirty prospective interviews in hand. 24 tape-recordings were made by Major F. W. Rawding who, with a grant from the Smuts Fund, recorded in India individuals who had remained after 1947, as well as Anglo-Indians and Roman Catholic missionaries. I have made 19 tape

recordings interviewing widows of ex-I.C.S. officers, missionaries, and tea-planters in this country. 6 further collections of films have been given, bringing the number to a total of 168 films. A survey of Business Archives held by firms which dealt with the Indian sub-Continent during the British period, was also undertaken by me to see what papers were available in this country. The results will be published with the additional accessions to the archive collection.

Some outstanding collections in the archive are: the complete papers of Sir Edward Benthall (Director, Reserve Bank of India; President, Bengal Chamber of Commerce and delegate to the Indian Round Table Conference, etc.); the papers of Sir Charles Tegart, Commissioner of Police, Bengal during the 1920's and 30's; Sir Henry Twynham's autobiography (Governor of the Central Provinces and Berar); and a number of Memoirs of Commissioners, Residents, District Officers and others, which have not been able to find a publisher, but which contain factual material, and private and unofficial opinions which can illuminate the official history of the Raj. Equally important is the domestic and social life recorded in letters (especially from women who lived and worked in India): these build up a picture of a way of life and of attitudes now vanished and often alien to the contemporary mind.

### The Film Collection

As will be imagined, innumerable photographs and slides have been collected, but what is more interesting is the collection of 8 and 16 mm ciné films – 'home-movies' – taken by the British in India between the years 1925 and 1947. These came to my notice through the written archive. A Mr. Johnston, who had sent a memoir of his life in the Army and as an I.C.S. officer in the United Provinces in the 1930's described therein how he made a series of small films to instruct the village people under his jurisdiction on hygiene, new agricultural methods, etc. He made these films using as actors the villagers themselves, as they did not relate to films which showed unfamiliar scenes and characters, but certainly did to themselves in their own village setting. The subjects he made films on were "The House-Fly"; "Improved Sugar cane"; "Child Welfare"; "Electricity your Servant" (which advertised the Ganges Canal Hydro-Electric Grid); "Cattle Protection against rinderpest by serum-simultaneous inoculation"; "Anti-cholera inoculation before pilgrimage" and one on "Horse-breeding". These alas, he left in India in Bombay, and I have failed to trace them. They were the first teaching films made by a District Officer in either the United Provinces or Bengal, and possibly the first made in the whole of India. He made them largely out of his own money. The first film of all that he made however was an anti-Congress propaganda film – he says of poor quality, but it is actually well done considering the tremendous limitations he was under. It has subtitles shot separately in Hindi, Urdu and English and runs for about 20 minutes, depicting the fall of a villager who supports a Congress riot, is arrested, tried and sentenced and finally reprieved.

The next collection I obtained was from Sir Eric Studd, a business man in Calcutta who had already given his diaries, and letters to his mother describing the 1911 Durbar and a tour of India with a deputation from the Grand Lodge of Freemasons in England to the Freemasons of India in 1927/28. In course of correspondence he mentioned he had taken some films during and after this tour. He gave eight of these films which show such interesting shots as the Bengal and Indian Iron Companies, building operations on the new harbour of Waltair, Vizagapatam, the Masonic processions, station scenes with the Great India Peninsula Railway – and excellent films of tiger-shooting, showing the lines of elephant and beaters, and the type of terrain they hunted in.

After these two collections of films I was on the look out for others, and they started to come in – either singly or in collections. The biggest collection was from Mrs. Mackrell, the widow of Captain Giles Mackrell. They took films on all their local and home leave, and then he continued during the second war with filming a rescue operation of refugees during the retreat from Burma into Assam in 1942. (These are described in the book *Forgotten Frontier* by Geoffrey Tyson [W. H. Targett & Co. Ltd., Calcutta 1945].) Another of Mackrell's films shows the making of the Aijal-Ledo road by coolies organised by the Indian Tea Association.

One of the films of greatest interest is of a medical tour made in the Ukhrul (Assam) by Dr. and Mrs. E. T. M. Taylor. This shows them preparing, packing and weighing the baskets to be carried by the coolies, and shots of the line of coolies walking along; stopping at various villages, carrying out dispensary work and camping in the evening. One often hears of going 'on tour' but I think this film must be a unique visual moving record. It is given additional value by the daily diary Mrs. Taylor kept, with details of the contents of the baskets, their food, camps, mileage, the patients they treated, etc., all told in a most amusing manner.

There are a number of films showing State ceremonial both British and India. The Viceroy's arrival and State drive at the Races, various durbars (including the last durbar held by the Governor in Rangoon), local ceremonial occasions with the Governor of Bengal (Sir John Anderson) and the Governor of Bihar and Orissa, Sir Hugh Stephenson – and the arms puja and dasera ceremony at Mysore and Jaipur.

There are films taken for relatives and friends in England which show us the daily life of the English family at home in their bungalow – show us the Residencies and their gardens and gardeners – show us children, their ayahs and syces – Christmas camps, leave camps, shooting and fishing. On the military side there are films of sports, parades, ceremonial and polo and there is one instructional film of drill, and gun-practice. (In military films the Gurkhas figure prominently.)

Then there are the films which depict what the British saw which interested them – the street scenes, both in city and hill-station; the villages and the villagers. A very good film of the road up to, and through the Khyber Pass (from Delhi to Abbotabad) with film on the different types and varied scenes along the way. There is a film taken in 1925 of Ootacamund and the Ooty hunt (which continues to this day) Walthair & Trivandrum in 1930. A number of films were taken of tribal dances, and village crafts and agriculture, which in time, I presume, will be the only moving visual reminder of these skills.

These films are unique records of life in British India: the National Film Archive in London recognising that these films are historically important keep a large proportion of the originals for preservation (often in a poor state), and generously give working copies to the Archive and the donors.

We also have a number of tape-recordings made in India and in England. The recordings made in India are of people who knew Gandhi and were connected with the early days of the Independence Movement, also of Anglo-Indians, individuals who stayed behind in India after 1947, and Jesuit missionaries. The recordings made in England are mainly of the widows of I.C.S. officers, one or two missionaries, and a fascinating recording by a married couple, the husband being in the orchestra of the Governor of Bombay, while his wife was Housekeeper. These tape-recordings together with the films form an incredibly evocative atmosphere of the time of the British Raj, particularly if seen and heard in conjunction with the written word.

I hope eventually to make one film from these films by taking the best portions from a number, and editing them to give a more coherent view to generations which have not experienced the visual image of that unique era. It will be accompanied by a commentary, and hopefully be a valuable teaching aid, while the original films will still be intact to be seen by those who wish for a more detailed and extensive image.

I would urge the retrieval of any similar types of homemovies in other parts of the world. The particularly personal aspect of these films brings out almost better than anything else the psychological and ethical attitudes of the small coterie of British Civil Servants in India.

I showed these films first at the Conference of South Asian Scholars in Sussex in 1974 where the audience consisted of specialists in Indian studies and they were appreciated by a group who had extensive knowledge of India and an informed opinion of British rule in India. But even so, to many of them it was the first glimpse of a phenomenon they had only read about and heard about second hand. It is very difficult for someone like myself of middle age who has always had connections with India (though through the Army and academic circles) to realise that younger generations, and non British people have not had this experience of the utter 'naturalness' of connection with India. Whenever I am in England, and I tell people what I am doing, it is very unusual if in any group there is not one

person with relatives who have been in India. I cannot describe the attitude to India better than by saying that from England it seemed like an extension of home. This may sound patronising and 'colonial' but it was not, as there was too much sentiment bound up in it. Therefore I think among a certain age-group and class there is a certain background knowledge of India, and for them the Civil Servants, Army, business people, etc., who went out there are real people — either 'Grandfather', 'Uncle Tom', 'my sister Jane' and are not clothed in that isolating and anonymous cloak of 'they' or 'the British'.

This is I think where these films which are so personal a record can help the younger generation who do not have the 'Indian experience'. For the first time they can see these people as people in their Indian setting. They will see too what the ICS themselves did not see (save for a few) actually how alien they were. The films, after a gap of 30 or 40 years show these English people as a group apart from the throngs of Indians on stations, camping, in bazaars, etc., set apart by their physique, their clothes (in those days so formal) their topics, and their unconscious air of rightness, born not out of self-righteousness but of an attitude of service to country and the Indian people.

However it was in America where I showed the films that I realised that to see them profitably the students must have some knowledge of British institutions, and of the social ethos of that particular era both in Europe and America, as otherwise the pictures can be regarded as merely funny and not as an evocation of a period in history. Likewise I think that any composite film must be made with factual commentary. The present day fashion to make films without comment leaving it to the teacher or student to put their own interpretation on cannot in my opinion be adhered to in the case of actual historical film material. So much is lost, and so much misinterpreted if some explanatory commentary is not given. Furthermore it is my strong opinion that some commentary should be given as these are home-movies, and would always have been shown by the people who took them to relatives and friends, and inevitably with a running commentary. Therefore to add one is a more authentic reinterpretation.

The films themselves vary in quality. Some are well shot and later edited with their own titles. The majority are unedited and many are very scenic. There are the usual amateur faults of swinging the camera from shot to shot too quickly, or staying on one shot too long. But amateur ciné cameras were uncommon in the period covered, and they were still being used much as a still camera. But the shots of the people themselves, their houses, gardens, servants, cars, dogs and horses taken so unconsciously at the time, now tell so much in five minutes of what they were like and the difficulties, differences and uniqueness of this period.

The following is a synopsis of the material in the films which I hold in the Archive Collection.

#### **Barclay (Army)**

1930's      4 films mainly relating to the Army; sports, machine gun practice (Seaforth High-landers).

#### **Barlow (I.C.S.)**

- 1945      1. Residency at Mhow, Indore. Resident; Freya Start; Victory Parades 1945 in Mhow and Indore. Beating the Retreat by Holkar State Band.
- 1941      2. Udaipur Spring Festival (colour).
- 1946      3. Film of tour by Political Officer in the Tirap Frontier Tract. Wancho tribesmen: Camp being put up: greetings of elders etc.
4. Film of Military sports.

#### **Barton (Army)**

1936/40/41 9 films — General tour and views, Delhi, North West Frontier Provinces, Bannu etc., Central Provinces and Kodai Kanal: Kashmir: Burma. Burma-China road via Lashio: fair at Hsipaw: local bazaar: Irrawaddy paddle steamers. 14th Rajputana Rifles, showing all aspects of Infantry training. On North West Frontier shows frontier training: training at Nasirabad Rajputana 1940/41, and training recruits from enlistment onwards.

**Bowlby (I.C.S.)**

1939/40 12 films of scenes in Burma, including Rangoon, city, race-course. T'wengye Yeng. Bazaar scenes; oil fields and rigs, man going down oil well. Shan States, Inlé lake, and boat rowed with leg paddle. Tanggye, bazaar, Inle Lake, Buddhist Festival. Last Durbar ever performed by Governor 1939. General shots all over Burma.

**Burt. (I.C.S.)**

1933-47 7 films of Lahore, Simla, Ajmer. Shots of Lahore in 1933/34 and in 1947 street scenes. Simla street scenes: Badshahi Mosque, the Mall etc. Shalimar gardens, farewell party to Governor, Sir Geoffrey de Montmorency. Ajmer Pushkar fair: street scenes; Muhurram processions — Irrigation scenes. Lahore September-October 1947 Refugees from India — trains shown with refugees arriving and departing.

**Corfield (I.C.S.)**

1940-44 6 films — Rewa, Maharajah — road to Umaria: festival of Muharram — New Delhi street scenes Simla street scenes — Maharajah Kumar at opening of Raj Parishad, Indore. Elephants, Gwalior Residency; Jaipur Residency, Tiger shoots: pig sticking: Abu Residency.

**Craster (Army)**

1931-35 7 films shot mainly in Jaipur when Colonel Cra'ster was commanding the Jaipur State Force. Jubilee celebrations: torchlight processions — Dasera at Jaipur and worshipping of conveyances before the Maharajah; Rajput warriors dressed as characters in battle of Rajmahal. Lawazma procession of paraphernalia Jaipur; City Palace — Garden party for Viceroy: Lord Willingdon and Princess Alice Countess of Athlone. Shots of Colonel Cra'ster's daughter with her pets. Ram fights, cock fights; elephant fight. Rambagh Palace — hounds — with the Master and the Maharaja. Road to Amber — Market. Mrs. Cra'ster in a palaquin; the head Armourer at palace, the Palace, bazaar. County scenes — polo at Jaipur with Hamut Singh.

**Christie (I.C.S.)**

1935 Visit of Sir John Anderson to the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

**Gidney (I.C.S.)**

1941 2 films of the exterior of the Residency Hyderabad, Deccan, with shots of Sir Claude and Lady Gidney arriving and departing by car. Film of the gardens of the Residency.

**Hunter (P.W.D. — U.P.)**

1928-38 6 films edited with titles. Home Life 1, 2 and 3 showing Hunters at their bungalow with their daughter, servants, in garden, buying goods from Chinese, picnic. Going to the Hills; train; Mussoorie, unpacking car; street scenes; rickshaws; hotel.

County Life 1 and 2. The Ganges Canal; Hardwar; canal scenes; hydro-electric power station; irrigation; bulls fighting; maize stalks being chopped; cattle being washed; cutting foliage for fodder; camel carriages; ploughing, furrowing, threshing; winnowing; wayside scenes.

Road Engineering: local material for roads; re-metalling, watering; maintenance; process of replacing old bridge with suspension bridge: mixing cement, concrete; women working; carpenters, concrete foundations; old bridge dismantled.

Cotton: processes of growing, picking, spinning and weaving cotton.

Sugar: processes in production of sugar from the cane.

**Hyde** (I.C.S. — Bastar States)

1937-40 9 films joined in one of scenes of tribal life, dancing, including Muria dances with horns, Parjas dancing. Administrator's camp at Bijapur; bazaar; cock-fighting: Christmas camp; dashera processions Jagdalpur; young Maharajah; sports; shots of Hydes swimming and going hunting; village durbar; tribute being brought; Mr. Hyde conducting land survey; State farm; winnowing machine, introduced by Mr. Hyde, sugar cane experiment. Durbar at Narayampur; fishing; Hyde's daughter and ayah being carried in dhoolie. Bela Dila Hill Station; teaparty with Sir John Hubback and Maharajah. Pony racing, Calcutta.

**Johnston** (I.C.S. — U.P.)

1930's Truth will Out. Anti-Congress propaganda film made by himself.

**Mackrell** (Assam/Burma)

1936-57 60 films, mainly taken during local leave — of fishing, shooting, camping. Shows cars being ferried over rivers; the beaters, tiger — skinning — the bag — 5 films taken in 1942 of rescue operations of refugees coming from Burma by Abors and Mishmis and Captain Mackrell. Supplies being dropped at Dapha. Two other rescues, crossing swollen rivers by elephant. Making the road from Ledo by the Indian Tea Association. A number of films of elephants: Tea plantations: Home by air 1931 (Imperial Airways).

**Maclean**

1940-43 Scenic films 1. Kashmir, Gulmarg. 2. Taxila, Lucknow, Amritsar, Peshawar.

**Meiklejohn** (I.F.S. Assam, Darjeeling, Bengal)

1932-48 15 films depicting, forest work, N.W.F.P. Resin collecting U.P. Trip to Manipur. Darjeeling, N. Bengal. Fishing; tea gardens; elephants; touring in the Sunderbands. Sir John Anderson at a Parade. Delhi, Abbotabad. Assam tribal dances taken in Shillong when Lord Mountbatten arrived in 1947. Kuman. Kashmir.

**Montgomery** (Army, Bihar and Orissa)

1928-30 7 films taken when Brigadier Montgomery was A.D.C. to Sir Hugh Stephenson the Governor. Polo at Patna; tent-pegging; Delhi and Patna horse shows, Patna Station; parade of battalion stationed at Dinapur, Sir Hugh Stephenson inspecting — Ceremonial occasions with Sir Hugh Stephenson: military parades; films of Governor's staff. Very good film of a large shoot with the lines of elephant beaters, guns etc. Lady Stephenson's fête in aid of Patna Child Welfare Centre. Governor's Christmas Camp. Governor's Durbar processions to and from the throne.  
Bombay — arrival of P. & O. Steamer with Lord Willingdon — Viceroy's launch — Cawnpore, Montgomery's bungalow — Dera Dun. Lucknow; journey down Grand Trunk Road — Rehearsal for Trooping the Colour, 2nd Bn. of H.L.I. Parade on polo ground Patna.  
Waziristan: a film originally taken as an instructional film for N.C.O.'s 2nd H.L.I. before the Battalion marched to Razmak. Loading of mules and pitching 160 lb tents included. Piquetting — Folding and rolling blankets.

**Stokes** (I.C.S. Madras)

1930-33 22 films taken in and around Madras including Mysore Dasara celebration and the arms puja. Three films taken on consecutive years 1931-33 of the building of the Mettur Dam. Point to points in Ootacamund. Kathakali dancers. Seven Pagodas; Madras Fort, and other archaeological remains. The Viceroy's house, and the Resident's house — the Grange, Adyar, views of house and garden.

**Studd.** (Business man.)

1927-30 18 films. 12 films taken during a tour of India by a deputation from the Grand Lodge of Freemasons in England to the Lodges in India. The area covered was

from Bombay — Calcutta, Benares, Lucknow and Agra, Patna — Assam — Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mysore, Ootacamund, Madura, Madras, Rangoon, Maymo, Mandalay. There are scenes in stations, on the railways, the Races; Viceroy's arrival and State drive; river scenes; street scenes; archaeological shots; the Bengal Iron Company and the Indian Iron Company, garden parties, building operations at Waltair; picnics, luncheon parties, church services; processions; docks; river scenes.

In the archive's written collection are Sir Eric Studd's diaries of this tour. 3 films of tiger shoots in great detail. 2 films of a walk taken by Sir Eric Studd from Sikkim to Darjeeling. They are mostly scenic, but the Devil Dance was put on at Pamionchi for their benefit and this is on film. There is also a written diary with these films.

#### **Taylor (Army/I.M.S. Assam)**

1932-35 4 films. Gurkha Rifle Guard (2/10th) Guard Mounting, parades, sports, dasera: head-cutting ceremony. A medical tour in the Ukhrul. Indian Medical Hospital Shillong. Inspection and inoculation. Lord and Lady Willingdon visiting Shillong — horse-racing, giving away prices, picnics.

#### **Uzielli (I.C.S.)**

1925-30 3 films — Ootacamund Hunt; races, market, Todas — Waltair houseboat on lake. West Coast of India, Trivandrum, etc.

#### **Williams (Army)**

1947 Two films taken by Major Williams of 11 Sikh Regt. while in Punjab Boundary Force organizing relief. Films depict scenes of refugees, Hindu and Moslem moving to and from Pakistan and India — (4 million passed through Jullundur in August, September, October 1947). There is no other moving record of this event as no Press were allowed.