

The City of the Future

Urban and other landscapes in the British Film Institute's National Archive

The City of the Future is a research project which explores the evolution of urban and other landscapes by researching archive film.

The database is the record of a search of the BFI National Archive's shot-list catalogue, which describes the great majority of the earlier films held by the archive shot by shot, augmented by further information from the NFTVA subject index and the BFI's internal *SIFT* database.

Of the 2,179 items listed, 506 have been viewed, and viewing notes transcribed into the database. These have been updated periodically (following identification of and visits to locations, for example). The last update was in October 2010.

Most of the films are included as documents of urban space, but the selection also covers transport, communications, oil, electrification, atomic weapons and some colonial subjects, including railway and port construction.

Some films are held by other archives and these can increasingly be viewed online at or via websites such as the British Film Institute's player.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film and at the sites of some UK regional and other archives, which are listed at filmarchives.org.uk

The Excel database can be searched either by using the 'find' option in the Edit menu. Alternatively, select 'filter' in the Data menu select 'filter', then 'autofilter', then click on one of the small arrows that appear at the head of the columns ('title' and 'comments' are probably the most useful) and select 'custom' (third from top), then filter using the 'contains' option. Viewing notes are in the 'comments' column. To search for films of a certain date, filter the date column. To return to all the data, click on the arrow for the column that you have filtered or that is active (shown with blue instead of black arrow) and select 'All'.

Lengthy viewing notes are indicated by #####. To view these, click on the cell twice.

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The database was initiated as the preliminary research for a DVD compilation of early films of urban and other landscapes. This has since developed in successive versions and currently comprises a selection of 68 films from 1896-1909 arranged on a network of interconnected maps. It is suitable for both gallery exhibition and viewing on a DVD player or computer and has been exhibited at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in Liverpool, UK 29 May - 27 June 2004, at Le Fresnoy: Studio national des arts contemporains, Tourcoing, France, 12 October - 24 December 2006 and as the basis of a 5-screen installation at the BFI Southbank Gallery, London, 23 November 2007 - 3 February 2008.

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Glossary of terms etc. in the database:

‘London on Film’: catalogue of 1996 exhibition at the Museum of London

NFTVA: the UK’s National Film and Television Archive (now renamed BFI National Archive)

Numbers in brackets are NFTVA location references

Phrases, sentences etc. in quotation marks are mostly either from NFTVA shot-list card index or from intertitles or commentary in the films

SIFT: British Film Institute’s database ‘Summary of Information on Film and Television’

TIDA: Travel and Industrial Development Association

tx: broadcast date