



**THE CAMERA IS OURS**

# **From Beside the Seaside to The English Inn: Restoration Programme 1**

*Introduced by BFI curator Ros Cranston.*

*Please note: Beside the Seaside depicts harmful racist views that were pervasive at the time.*

Marion Grierson launches our revelatory programme with her lyrical and inventive film *Beside the Seaside*, which uses a witty array of cinematic techniques to stylish effect. In *King Penguins*, Mary Field was quick to spot the filmic potential of a now-perennial favourite, including some ingenious underwater slow-motion shots; while Evelyn Spice takes illuminating and wry peeks into goings-on at London Zoo in *Behind the Scenes*. In *They Also Serve* Ruby Grierson created a dramatised documentary dedicated to 'the Housewives of Britain'. We end our evening at *The English Inn*, which was the directorial debut of Britain's most prolific female director, Muriel Box.

## **Beside the Seaside**

If any newcomer to the documentary field should require a handy compendium of information relating to his craft, he will find all that he needs in *Beside the Seaside*. Miss Grierson has incorporated in this film practically every apposite screen-device, from synchronized sound and animated diagrams to slow-motion and the wipe-dissolve: what is more, she has applied to them a lightness and assurance of touch which may well be envied. The result is not perhaps perfect, but it shows a greater command of ideas – ideas worthy of the name – than half-a-dozen other films of normal accomplishment.

The impressionism of this method is not without its dangers, but restraint, an eye for characteristic and revealing detail, and a sense of humour, have here kept them admirably in the background. The component shots are often adroitly cut and timed, and the camera positions are varied and well chosen (even the stationary recording of a beach concert-party has purpose behind it). In its surroundings the Military Band accompaniment is unusually apt. One recollects such items as the receding subtitle LONDON, with white lines spreading outwards from it to points on a map, to suggest the exodus to the sea; and the siesta sequence in slow-motion, unfortunately too protracted but amusingly conceived.

*Sight and Sound, Winter 1935-6*

## **King Penguins**

This film stands out above all others on the subject of penguins. In the Edinburgh Zoo these birds appear to lead a very natural life, even succeeding in rearing their young, and thus afford excellent material for a serious study of this kind. The photography is very good and covers a great number of aspects of the birds' behaviour, and the inclusion of a few shots of the Antarctic at the beginning of the film is a useful addition. The underwater sequences in slow-motion show the swimming well. The direction is masterly,

resulting in a logically arranged film of great interest and educational value. The commentary also is first class, and in keeping with the high standard of the photography. Altogether an attractive, outstanding, and first-class film.

**Monthly Film Bulletin, June 1939**

### **Behind the Scenes**

The 'Animal Kingdom' series of two-reel films now being issued by Strand Zoological Productions is one of the most important and is likely to prove one of the most popular, series of documentary films produced to date. Stuart Legg, the producer of the series, and all those working on the films have had the full collaboration, in facilities and advice, of Dr Julian Huxley and the staff of the Zoo.

*Behind the Scenes*, directed by Evelyn Spice and photographed by Paul Burnford, is a survey of the routine work at Regent's Park. A staff of 360, curators, scientists and keepers, is employed to ensure that the animals are properly fed, housed, and cared for in the interests of the animals themselves, the scientist and research worker, and the general public. The film presents the Zoo, not as a collection of cages with animals in them, but as a people's university and a scientist's laboratory where the animal kingdom – there are now 6,500 animals in the collection – can be observed and studied under constantly improved conditions.

**William Farr, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1938**

### **They Also Serve**

Ruby Grierson was the sister of John Grierson, founder of the 1930s British Documentary Movement. Born in Scotland in 1904, she trained as a teacher but became involved with the documentarists when she worked as an uncredited assistant on the seminal social documentary *Housing Problems* (1935). Her ability to put the working-class women interviewees at ease has since been credited by her fellow crew members for making the film the remarkable social document it is.

*They Also Serve*, a home front propaganda film, showed the importance to the war effort of the everyday work of the British housewife. Tragically, this was to be Grierson's final film. While making a film about the evacuation of children to Canada in 1940, the liner she was travelling on was torpedoed and Grierson was killed. Her humanity for her subjects and enthusiasm for the pure documentary style was a great loss to the documentary movement.

**Sarah Easen, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

### **The English Inn**

Muriel Violette Baker was born in New Malden on the outskirts of London in September 1905, the third child of a family she described as Respectable Poor. Influenced by her mother's progressive, left-wing ideas, Muriel developed a passion for writing, theatre and cinema, attempting unsuccessfully to become a professional actress and ballet dancer. She gained low-level employment in the film industry, including work as a continuity girl for British International Pictures, but the key event was her marriage to Sydney Box in 1935, which nurtured a mutual talent for playwriting. They completed nearly 40 short plays before the outbreak of war in 1939. During the war, Muriel assisted her husband in running Verity Films, gaining her first experience of directing with *The English Inn*, a typical Verity propaganda short produced for the British Council.

**Andrew Spicer, BFI Screenonline, [screenonline.org.uk](http://screenonline.org.uk)**

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### BESIDE THE SEASIDE

*Director:* Marion Grierson  
*Production Company:* Strand Film Company  
*Sponsor:* TIDA  
*Producer:* Marion Grierson  
*Assistant Director:* Alex Shaw  
*Commentary Writer:* W.H. Auden  
*Camera Operators:* F. Gamage, George Noble  
*Music Performed by:* 43rd Light Infantry Band  
*Conductor:* D.J. Plater  
UK 1935  
23 mins

### KING PENGUINS

*Director:* Mary Field  
*Production Company:* Gaumont-British Instructional  
*Photography:* George W. Pocknall, G.W. Macpherson  
UK 1938  
19 mins

### BEHIND THE SCENES

*Director:* Evelyn Spice  
*Production Company:* Strand Zoological Productions  
*Producer:* Stuart Legg  
*Photography:* Paul Burnford  
UK 1938  
17 mins

### THEY ALSO SERVE

*Director:* R.I. Grierson  
*Production Company:* Realist Film Unit  
*Sponsor:* Ministry of Information  
*Producer:* John Taylor  
*Photography:* A.E. Jeakins  
*Sound:* H. Halsted  
UK 1940  
9 mins

### THE ENGLISH INN

*Director:* Muriel Baker  
*Production Company:* Verity Films  
*Producer:* James Carr  
*Script:* Thomas Burke, Max Munden  
*Photography:* James Rogers, Reg Wyer  
*Editor:* John Durst  
*Music:* William Alwyn  
*Studio:* Merton Park  
UK 1941  
11 mins

Restored by the BFI National Archive and The Film Foundation.  
Restoration funding provided by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation.



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### SEEN & HEARD: DARING FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

#### Skate Kitchen

Tue 1 Mar 20:40; Sun 13 Mar 20:45

#### Divines

Wed 2 Mar 20:50; Tue 15 Mar 20:50

#### Jinn

Sat 5 Mar 17:45; Tue 8 Mar 21:00

#### 37 Seconds (37 sekanzu)

Sat 5 Mar 20:30; Sat 12 Mar 20:45

#### Water Lilies (Naissance des pieuvres)

Sun 6 Mar 18:45; Mon 14 Mar 20:50

#### Marie Antoinette

Tue 8 Mar 18:10 (+ intro by Hannah Strong, Little White Lies Digital Editor and author of *Sofia Coppola: Forever Young*); Sun 13 Mar 18:00

#### Somersault

Fri 11 Mar 20:50; Mon 14 Mar 18:10

### THE CAMERA IS OURS:

#### BRITAIN'S WOMEN DOCUMENTARY MAKERS

#### From Beside the Seaside to the English Inn: Restoration Programme 1 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston

Thu 3 Mar 18:15

#### For Sama + intro by director Waad Al-Kateab + Children of the Ruins

Thu 3 Mar 20:30

#### The Camera Is Ours: Study Day + Independent Miss Craigie + Q&A with director Lizzie Thynne and producer Hollie Price

Sat 5 Mar 12:00-17:00

#### From the Sea to the Land Beyond

Sat 5 Mar 18:15

#### Seniors Free Archive Matinee: White Riot + discussion

Mon 7 Mar 14:00

#### Cow

Tue 8 Mar 20:40

#### The Hermit of Treig + Q&A with director Lizzie MacKenzie

Fri 11 Mar 18:10

#### From Birth-Day to Something Nice to Eat: Restoration Programme 2 + intro by BFI curator Ros Cranston

Mon 14 Mar 18:15

#### Hostile + director Sonita Gale in conversation with journalist Jon Snow

Tue 15 Mar 18:00

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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