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Digital Resources for Davies' Photographs

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SUMMARY

I helped to establish a special collection at the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum during my PhD at the University of Bristol (via the SWW DTP). Firstly, items were digitally recorded and linked in an online catalogue. Secondly, the collection was promoted via a free-to-attend conference and open-access article in the international, peer-reviewed journal, *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*.ⁱ

What did you do?

This project provided a new tool in the form of digital museum records, undertook activities to develop teaching and open access research, and published under an open license. Between October 2018 and March 2019, I physically and digitally catalogued film photographs on behalf of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum to help establish the Pamela Davies Collection, named after the British film continuity supervisor who used these images for reference. After making items searchable and interconnected via hyperlink pathways in the Museum's database and user-facing catalogue, I encouraged use of the new resource. I selected photographs to feature in the 'Female Screens' undergraduate unit at the University of Exeter. In March 2019, I organised the free 'Working the Film Script: Hidden Production Histories' conference. This was attended by the keynote speaker Dr Melanie Williams, an expert on continuity supervision and women's film history. A student volunteer assisted me with the cataloguing and conference programme design. In 2020, I followed up with an open-access journal article to introduce the collection.

Why did you do it?

Continuity supervisors and their assistants have the vital role of ensuring films cohere with the shooting script. The Pamela Davies Collection enriches our knowledge of a filmmaking role predominately occupied by women that has historically been overlooked or erroneously regarded as a non-technical role, due to gender bias in the industry and the politics of trade union membership. The collection also has broader implications for the study of film stardom and production history, as the photographs served multiple marketing and technical functions outside of Davies' work. What better way to celebrate these women than to provide evidence of their production skills via snapshots of Davies on the film set and her annotated photographs (Figure 1)? As the Arts Council-accredited Bill Douglas Cinema Museum offers free access to the public and scholars regardless of institutional affiliation, the catalogued photographs are now readily searchable in a specialist facility. They can also be viewed in the context of other relevant collections, as visitors will opt to reinterpret Davies in relation to linked material on film personalities and so forth. The follow-up promotion of the collection via a free to attend conference, selection of teaching resources, and journal was designed to create a bridge between the Museum and different audiences of interest. This adhered to the philosophy that open access materials need to be findable as well as readily available.ⁱⁱ

How did you do it?

The initial cataloguing and digitisation phase in 2018-2019 was made possible by an AHRC award during my PhD at the University of Bristol. I also trained in cataloguing and metadata under the Curator and had assistance from a student volunteer to develop their cultural heritage career. My themed conference was funded by the University of Exeter. The article was written and peer-reviewed in 2020, for publication in a journal issue on women's film history.

What barriers / challenges did you have to overcome?

The project had to be justified to the AHRC on the basis that it would develop my career and feature OA outputs. The cataloguing phase involved technical and target audience challenges. I was presented with over 600 individual photographs taken during film production in post-war Britain. The cataloguing process drew on my PhD research expertise, but it was a barrier to identify the provenance of very obscure items (including their subjects, date, film, attribution, etc.). Therefore, I developed a cataloguing workflow to make this more efficient, cross-referencing other OA databases such as IMDb.com and sharing my completed filmography spreadsheet via the journal article. I also completed in-house training to generate digital records with contextual metadata.ⁱⁱⁱ To provide useful research notes for a broad Museum audience, from the public to students, I identified recurrent and popular subjects (film stars, studios, etc.) and included hyperlinks to relevant parts of the Museum's collection (Figure 2). The article required image reproduction permissions from the Museum and the relevant film company, which is now defunct, and so I had to research and contact its successor (ION films).

What does it mean for you and your research?

The project complemented my doctoral research on widescreen filmmaking, as Pamela Davies worked on films that are examined in my thesis and so there were production photographs to discover. As an ECR, expanding OA tools and publishing has rounded-out my research portfolio.

How might your findings / approach help other researchers?

Researchers might learn from this open access case study, particularly those seeking to produce OA outputs in a cultural heritage or cross-institutional context. It stresses external technical training and collaboration between stakeholders at both pre- and post- project stages (research councils, archivists, students, funders, external experts, journal editors, license holders, etc.). Researchers can also learn from the new learning resource itself and my OA journal article, the latter of which provides a methodological framework. The new Pamela Davies Collection could lead to multiple unforeseen research outputs as scholars can browse a large corpus of relevant material in the Museum's catalogue, which I have helped to expand and make accessible.

Additional Information



Figure 1. Excerpt from photography contact sheet featuring Pamela Davies and Sophia Loren. Image sourced from the Pamela Davies Collection, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, UK.

The Bill Douglas
CINEMA MUSEUM

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Home > Explore the collection > Categories > Photograph

Photography contact sheets for 'Judith' featuring Pamela Davies, Daniel Mann and Sophia Loren

Search the collection...

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Twenty-three black and white photography contact sheets for 'Judith', featuring continuity supervisor Pamela Davies, director Daniel Mann, and actors Sophia Loren, Jack Hawkins and Peter Finch. Images include cast and crew at a press conference, shooting on location in Israel, and head shots of Sophia Loren taken by Bob Penn.

Item number:	1133
Category:	Photograph
Type:	Film Production
Dimensions:	A4
Related people:	Pamela Davies
	Sophia Loren
	Jack Hawkins

Part of the Pamela Davies Collection

Figure 2. Museum catalogue entry related to Figure 1, with contextual metadata and links.

ⁱ Steven Roberts, 'The Pamela Davies Collection: Continuity Supervision in British Widescreen and Colour Cinema', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, Archival Opportunities and Absences in Women's Film and Television Histories Dossier, no. 20, 2020, pp. 220–227, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.20.17>

ⁱⁱ GO FAIR Initiative, 'FAIR Principles', <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

ⁱⁱⁱ GO FAIR Initiative, 'F2: Data are described with rich metadata', <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/f2-data-described-rich-metadata/>