

BDC Exhibition Project Report by Lisa Stead

This five week project involved working with first, second and third year undergraduate students in the creation of two new exhibition cases at the Bill Douglas Centre. The centre provides the opportunity to explore film culture from a unique standpoint—to understand what film means for its audiences by looking beyond the film text itself and into the extra-textual networks that surround cinema-going. In creating these new displays, we wanted to encourage undergraduates to use the centre from an early stage in their studies, and give them the invaluable opportunity to work hands-on with a huge range of original materials unique to the BDC.

The first case was to be themed around Bette Davis in celebration of her centenary this year; the second around British stardom. The students were given an introduction to the archive and the online EVE facilities for searching the BDC catalogue. After discussing their initial ideas and goals for the project, focusing in particular on what they felt would make a visually engaging, original addition to the museum, students researched items for both displays. In looking at British stardom, they selected a wide range of British actors and actresses across the history of cinema, including such figures as Deborah Kerr, Cary Grant and Laurence Olivier.

Students were then given the opportunity to work within the archive itself, in the processes learning how the archive is organised, how to retrieve and handle object and how a range materials are stored and cared for. The students then took the time to review the materials they had collected, developing ideas for how to arrange them in the exhibition cases and experimenting with a number of possible chronological and thematic displays. The students aimed to include as much pictorial material as possible to make the displays visually arresting, and sought out a number of the museum's more obscure items—such as a Cary Grant matchbox and cinema star collectable hairpins—bringing to light the pervasive influence of cinema marketing in popular culture.

The Davis Centenary case was arranged chronologically, grouped around significant periods in her career to show the development and adaptability of her star persona across her career. Students made full use of the exhibition space, arranging items to give the case depth and a clear sense of progression, charting her rise to stardom through autographed photos, posters, biographies and handbills.

For the British Stars display, students again chose a loose chronological ordering, with stars grouped into three main sections, progressing from the likes of John Mills through Cary Grant to Hitchcock as director and cameo star. The impressive range of materials on display included cigarette cards, photographs, novel adaptations, fan magazine articles and even a Christmas card from the Hitchcock family. Students were then wrote explanatory text to accompany the items on display, giving brief biographical information for the personalities discussed and placing the items in the overall context of each exhibit as a whole.

The project gave the students a strong introduction to the range of materials available for use in their own research and study, encouraging them to consider how extra-textual materials circulate in cinema culture and how they may be addressed critically. Students worked extremely well together

with a real enthusiasm for the project, embracing the opportunity to be involved with the archive. They have created two engaging and detailed new displays in a short amount of time, and in the process brought to light some fascinating new materials.

Students involved in the display were:

Jade Cancelliere
Claire Dunstall
Rosemarie Gibbs
Emma Waterson
Emily Nicholson
James White
Kalina Newman
Michael Coughlin
Rebecca Hinchliffe
Hannah Worrall
Alexander Hawkins
Tom Norris

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