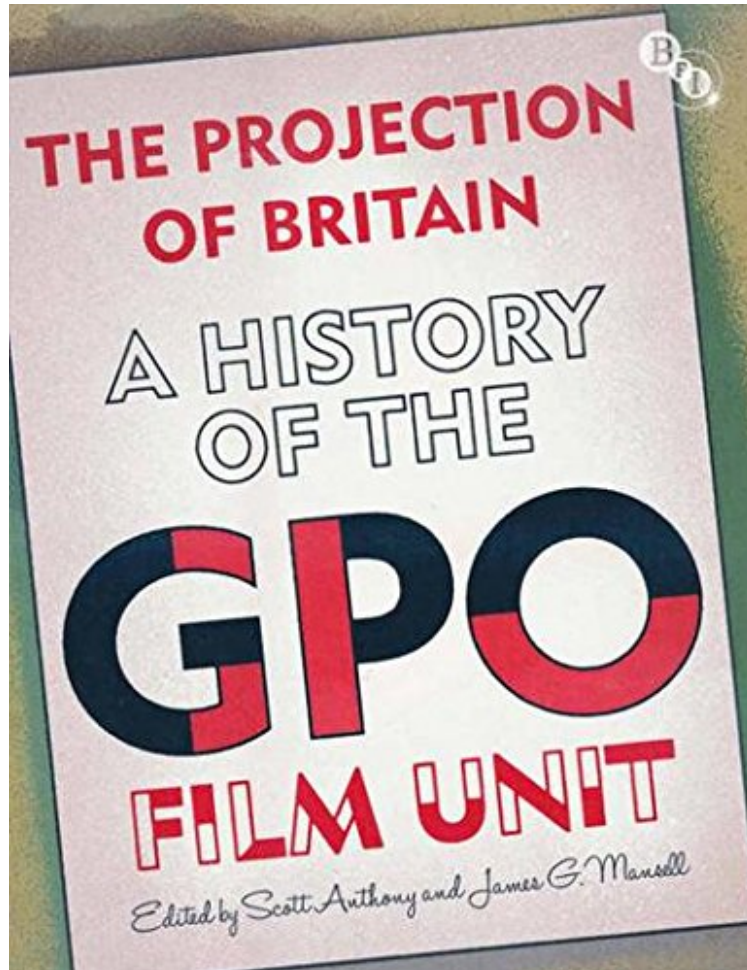


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The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit

James Mansell

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The General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit sat at the creative epicentre of Britain in the 1930s. It nurtured a vital crop of artistic talent, built a forum for a new kind of cinematic address and created Britain's first self-consciously national cinema. In 2011, UNESCO added its work to the UK Memory of the World Register, recognising its status as part of Britain's cultural heritage. Elements of the GPO Film Unit's story are well known: John Grierson's development of documentary cinema; the influence of Mass Observation and Surrealism on its cinematic vision; the WattAudenBritten collaboration Night Mail. The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit brings together primary materials and critical appraisals to revisit, re-contextualise and revitalise these seminal moments in British cinema. Here, the

insights of an archivist, a musicologist, a design historian, a sports historian, a geographer and a postman among others have been edited into a rich critical archaeology of a compelling moment in cinematic history. Interspersed with these essays are primary materials memoirs, magazine articles, posters and government documents that detail everything from Alberto Cavalcanti's vision for the documentary movement to a claim for the clothes Humphrey Jennings lost while shooting on location. In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the GPO Film Unit and its work, on the big screen, in DVD boxsets and on the web. *The Projection of Britain* ties together the Unit's diverse artistic, historical and cultural threads into an essential one-stop resource. Provocative, imaginative and ambitious, this expansive study is the definitive companion to an extraordinary episode in cinematic history.

Read an article about the book by the University of Cambridge: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/letters-through-a-lens/> 'The output of the GPO Film Unit was immensely varied, at times truly experimental and often exceptionally enjoyable. And now there's a truly terrific book to draw together much of the debate about these films and to stimulate further thinking...[It is] beautifully designed and contains such a wonderful range of striking pictures from the 1930s...one of the book's strengths is its firm grounding in the history and culture of the 1930s, even as this is interpreted and understood from the perspective of the early twenty-first century. There are reprints of key documents about this history and a number of compelling visual essays, as well as a fascinating essay by Steve Foxon about the restoration of the films.' - John Wyver, *Illuminations* 'Certainly, it's hard to think of a better single-volume survey.' - Michael Brooke, *Sight Sound* 'This beautifully produced volume is dedicated to the memory of the director Pat Jackson (1916-2011) and is a fitting tribute to his achievements...*The Projection of Britain* is, like the GPO Film Unit itself, a bold, fascinating, eccentric and ambitious endeavour...this is a fine tribute to an exciting and influential cultural project, and an essential companion to the films now available in lavishly packaged anthologies from the BFI.' - David Collard, *Times Literary Supplement* 'The book is handsomely produced...In general, the 22 essays in *The Projection of Britain: A History of the GPO Film Unit* contribute to a vast literature on the documentary film movement in Britain, and perhaps represent a return to a celebration of its achievements after years of more sceptical evaluations.' -D. L. LeMahieu, *Twentieth Century British History* 'Each section [of the book] invites the reader to wonder at a new aspect of the GPO Film Unit's history, and then these questions are either answered or deepened by the following sections. This structure also allows the reader to dip in and out; many of the chapters make excellent teaching resources. This book is therefore an excellent primer, at undergraduate and postgraduate level, for the GPO Film Unit's history. This structure is complemented by the variety of voices represented in the line-up of authors...The diversity of author and background creates a vibrant portrait of the far reaching cultural significance of the GPO Film Unit at the time. The ingredients that hold this all together, and makes this book spectacularly attractive for tutors, are the sections containing reproduced historical documents. Part three of the book is practically a course reader, with contributions from Hardy, Reiniger, Sussex, Wright and Watt.' - Dafydd Sills-Jones, *British Universities Film Video Council*

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From the Back Cover
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