



**Irish Film** Institute



# The Irish Film Archive - An Evolution

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BOLESŁAS MATUSZEWSKI

*Une Nouvelle  
Source de l'Histoire*

(CRÉATION D'UN DÉPÔT  
DE CINÉMATOGRAPHIE HISTORIQUE)

Paris, mars 1898

# Irish Film Archive-An Evolution

## The value of film

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Film emerged in the late 1890s.

Initially treated as low art/ entertainment .

Instant recognition as an historical source.

Reluctance to include it in cultural repositories.

Not as an object worth collecting in its own right.

Custodial confusion within cultural institutions.

Collections – how to classify ?



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## the value of film

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After WW1 Film seen in a new light - film can be used as a propaganda & educational tool.

Impact of the 1<sup>st</sup> WW on nationalism and need to protect cultural output/ identity.

Nations begin to move towards collecting examples of their national cinematic identity.

Through MoMA and others the art of film becomes acknowledged.

Film preservation is formally situated within the archiving sector, with the creation of the International Federation of Film Archives



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## Historical context

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British occupied Dublin Castle 1171-1922

seat of the British government's administration in Ireland.

Home rule efforts halted by WW1

Rebellion against British rule 1916

War of Independence 1919-1921

Irish Free State established 1922

Civil War in Ireland 1923

Ireland was neutral in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War

Irish Republic established in 1949





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## Historical context

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Ireland poor and agricultural society

Conservative politics closely entwined with the Roman Catholic Church

After independence in 1922 Irish government set about establishing institutions of State.

Church carried out many social functions, hospitals, schools, welfare etc.

Slow roll out of electricity, rural electrification scheme 1946 on didn't reach some rural areas until 1970s.

Large amount of emigration to UK and America ( Irish American films)



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## Cultural context

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Ireland's main National Cultural Institutions were created by the British in the 1800s.

National Gallery of Ireland 1864.

National Library and National Museum 1877.

Celtic revival , cultural nationalism focused on art, music, sport, literature and language.

On the British exhibition circuit -common language .

Nearly no films in Irish.

No national television station until 1961.



# The Use and Misuse of FILMS

By HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI



POPE PIUS XI

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

## Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

### Historical context

Fear of a new medium Pope Pius XI issued 1936 Papal Encyclical,

*"Vigilanti Cura – On the Motion Picture" 'the growing influence of cinema and its threat to Christian morality'*

Little indigenous film production, academic Kevin Rockett lists 40 titles between 1901 and 1940.

Film seen as 'foreign' and a threat to Irish culture.

Film not considered an indigenous art form.

# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## Historical context

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Dublin Archbishop John Charles McQuaid believed it was important that the Church was actively involved in the production and distribution of film.

Needed to counteract the immoral impact of commercially produced (foreign) films.

Priests financed projectors for the National Film Institute with their own money.

Church, State and Film Institute came together to make worthy films.





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

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NLI founded in 1943.

Educational and moral guardian role in the 40s -80s.

Taught filmmaking & film projection.

Distributing library of acceptable & educational films.

Produced cultural, public information & instructional films.

Encouraged amateur and Irish language film making.

Large number of films made by clergy and religious orders.



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

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Calls for an Irish equivalent of MoMA from the late 30s.

Film not within remit of State funded cultural institutions.

Liam O'Leary & George Morrison both tried unsuccessfully.

Calls in the media in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

A National Need: An Irish Film Archive, Séamus O'Connor.

published in An Irish Quarterly Review, Vol. 54, No. 213  
(Spring, 1965), pp. 83-90;

Irish Province of the Society of Jesus



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

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1970s started to make our own films, not just a location.

First wave of Irish cinema, Joe Comerford, Bob Quinn, Pat Murphy.

Lobbying led to the development of the first Irish film board in 1980.

Increase in media studies & academic interest in film in Ireland.

As had been the case with the development of AFI in the US, call for a place where film could be studied & appreciated.

Interest in older “Irish “ film, Kevin Rockett’s filmography (1996).





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

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By 1982 the Board of the IFI had become more secular and liberal.

Deleted references to the *Vigilanti Cura* from the articles of association, and renamed - the Irish Film Institute.

No longer concerned with the moral protection of audiences.

Education still a significant objective and an Education Department developed.

Encouraged critical engagement with cinema, including uncertified and banned film.



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

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Drive to create the Irish Film Centre (IFC) as a home for the Institute and other organisations dealing with film culture and production.

18<sup>th</sup> Century Quaker Meeting House was purchased, in the soon to be regenerated area of Temple Bar in Dublin;

Developed the core film Exhibition & the Education & Schools programmes.

Part of this plan included a campaign to establish a 'National Film Archive'.





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## current status

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1992 IFI moved into our current home in Dublin city centre.  
our core areas of activity are: **EXHIBIT, PRESERVE EDUCATE**

- Ireland was one of the last countries in Europe to establish a National Film Archive.
- The new location allowed for a custom-built storage and research facility to be built to house the Archive.
- After years of inaction began to collect material made in or about Ireland, or by Irish people abroad.
- Irish Film Archive collection created in 1986.
- Building officially launched in 1992.





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

current status

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The Archive **acquires, preserves** and makes **available** Ireland's moving image heritage for the benefit of current and future generations.

The material held spans from 1897 to the present day, chronicling the development of modern Ireland in a truly accessible manner.

The Archive collection reflects the many facets of indigenous film production, both commercial and amateur.

Artefacts & documents relating to the film industry and history of cinema, images, production notes, correspondence, newspaper clippings, books and equipment.



# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

current status

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Collection built from a core of Irish material from the IFI's distributing library.

Over the past 3 decades, more than 750 organisations and individuals have deposited material.

Archive collection = 30,000 cans of film and 15,000 broadcast-quality tapes.

Only independent national repository of moving Image in Ireland.

Two buildings - campaign to open new building – 2018.

13 staff, 3 cinemas, café bar, bookshop.

On line access via IFI player.







# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## current status- challenges

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Main funder is the Arts Council but the IFI generates 75% of its revenue through its commercial activities.

Very dependant on IFI maintaining high box office returns & public support.

No supporting legislation for film preservation.

No statutory deposit.

No film laboratories in Ireland.

Very dependant on other countries' expertise and resources.





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution

## current status- challenges

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Irish Film Institute is still a private company with charitable status.

No supporting legislation but have archiving agreements with Arts Council, BAI Screen Ireland.

No State funding of film preservation BAI have an archiving scheme.

Concentration on production by the Irish Film Board.

Talks to partner with NLI ended when the recession hit in mid 2000s.

State interference with governance of NCIs made IFI board cautious.

Dependent for many years on government employment scheme.

Dependent on commercial revenue and grants for core funding.

# Irish Film Archive-An Evolution

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Development of an Irish national film archive corresponded with:

Forming of the first Irish Film Board in 1980 and the official creation of an Irish national film industry.

Development of sub-national archives in Scotland, Wales in the 70s and 80s.

Developing global heritage & preservation movements.

Recognition of subnational/ regional collections by FIAF.

UNESCO recommendation on safeguarding film 1980.





# Irish Film Archive- An Evolution :

## Conclusions

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Lack of indigenous production for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Lack of recognition of film as Irish, when the identity of the new state was being forged.

The birth of cinema was too late to benefit from the British cultural agenda.

Church & State dictated what is historically, culturally important.

Lack of urgency caused by 2<sup>nd</sup> WW that led to the setting up of film archives in countries more involved in the conflict.

Political & industry indifference ( no champion for film preservation such as Martin Scorsese in the US or John Paul Getty Jnr in the UK).

Lack of state finances and decline in arts funding from the 1990s onwards.

IFI victim of our own success!