

CATALOGUING FILMS IN ARCHIVES

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The subject of this paper is the cataloguing of films, and of related material created in the production, distribution and exhibition of films (e.g. scripts, set designs, stills, advertising brochures, etc.). It is not concerned with the cataloguing of books in film archives, which will presumably follow the established practice of book libraries.
- 1.2 The cataloguing of films is a large and complex subject. We can only at this stage consider general principles. Not until these have been agreed, can we go on to consider matters of detail, including precise definitions of each item to be recorded in the catalogue. The purpose of this paper is to break down the general principles of film cataloguing into its elements, so that each can be considered as a separate question. Each question is followed by one or more propositions, which are not intended as final answers but only to stimulate and guide discussion.

2. What is the Purpose of Cataloguing?

- 2.1 Proposition: The purpose of an archive catalogue is to describe the films in the possession of the archive, and of any other material relating to them, in such a way that any particular film, or any item of information concerning it, may be discovered easily and quickly.

3. What is the Relationship between Film Cataloguing and Book Cataloguing?

- 3.1 Proposition 1: It is desirable that the principles of film cataloguing should follow those of book cataloguing for the following two reasons:
- 3.11 Because it would be unwise to ignore the experience which book librarians have accumulated for many centuries.
- 3.12 Because it is desirable that research workers should be encouraged to consult films as easily as they have learnt to consult books.
- 3.2 Proposition 2: Nevertheless, because films are materially different from books there are unavoidable differences between film cataloguing and book cataloguing. For example:
- 3.21 A book is normally catalogued under the name of the author, but it is more convenient to catalogue a film under its title.
- 3.22 Newsreels should be catalogued under the dates of the events recorded in them.
- 3.23 Each main entry in a film catalogue must be far more detailed and descriptive than in a book catalogue, and it must be indexed in far greater detail, in order to save research workers from unnecessary viewing of films, which is a waste of their time, and of the time of the archive staff, and also causes wear of the archive's film copies.

4. What Information should a Film Catalogue Contain?

4.1 Proposition: For the detailed description of a film and its related material, six kinds of information are important, namely:

- (a) Title
- (b) Production Credits (producer, director, cast, etc.)
- (c) Details of Distribution
- (d) Details of Archive Acquisition
- (e) Content (i.e. what is seen on the screen)
- (f) Related Production or Exploitation Material (scripts, set designs, posters, stills, etc.)
- (g) Published References (criticisms, reviews, etc.)
- (h) Technical Information (width of film, length, whether sound or silent, etc.)

5. Information Retrieval: How is the Information contained in the Catalogue to be made Accessible?

5.1 Proposition 1: When the required data have been established, it must be decided in what form they are to be recorded. The main consideration in making this decision, however, must be the needs of the user. What information are various types of user likely to need? How can they acquire it most easily, most quickly and most completely? Here two broad distinctions can be made:

5.11 A large number of users will have a particular film (or films) in mind, and will want to turn to that film directly, either to obtain all possible information about it, or to obtain some particular piece of information. They will do this by referring to the title.

5.12 Many other users will proceed in a contrary direction, beginning with a different kind of question in order to arrive at a film title (or titles) which will answer that question. For example, they may want to know:

What films does the archive hold which were produced by the Keystone Company of America?

What films does it hold directed by Mauritz Stiller?

What films does it have with Asta Nielsen?

Does the archive possess any films showing the building of an Eskimo igloo?

What was the original Russian title of the film known in English as Fragment of an Empire?

5.2 Proposition 2: The most convenient way to meet these two kinds of need is to arrange the catalogue into two main parts, namely:

5.21 a Main Entry, under the title of the film, which contains all the information known about it, and with cross-references from alternative titles.

5.22 an Index, or series of indexes, to the main entries.

6. What Data are Required under each Head?

6.1 Proposition: The data required under each head are as follows:

6.11 Title: The main entry should always be under the original title in its original language, since this is the only certain means of identification, and the only way to avoid confusion internationally. Alternative titles, or translated titles in other languages, may be added, and entered as cross references. * (For proposals as to Missing Titles, Untitled Films and Supplied Titles, see National Film Archive Cataloguing Rules, pub. British Film Institute, London 1960).

6.12 Production Credits. These should include:

Studio
Sponsor
Production Company
Production personnel (e.g. producer, director, editor, etc.)
Cast
Source of material (e.g. novel or play on which film is based)
Country of Origin
Date (year of first release)
Certification (e.g. censor's certificate)

6.13 Distribution Details:

Name of distributor
Certification (e.g. censor's certificate)
Registration (for copyright or other legal requirements)

6.14 Details of Acquisition:

Donor (or source from which acquired)
Date received **

6.15 Content. Description of story (in the case of a fiction film) or of subject-matter (in the case of a documentary). This description can be in any of the following forms:

* The American Library of Congress and UNESCO have recommended that each language version of a film be catalogued under its own title, which follows the recognised procedure for book cataloguing. We suggest, however, that the titles of a film are too easily changeable to be given the respect traditionally accorded to the title page of a book.

** In the National Film Archive, we would also add here "Selection Committee reference" and "Reason for Acquisition".

- (i) very brief synopsis of whole film.
- (ii) more detailed description of scenes and sequences in each reel.
- (iii) description of each shot in the film.

For archival purposes (i) is of little value. A shot-by-shot analysis, as in (iii), is essential for a production library, but for other purposes is very laborious both to compile and to read. The middle way, (ii), is probably a reasonable compromise for most archives.

6.16 Related Material. This may be catalogued under the title of the film, or other convenient form of identification (e.g. name of actor for photographic portraits not related to any particular film) by established methods for cataloguing photographs, pamphlets, etc., and with any necessary cross-references.

6.17 Published References. References to published criticism, reviews, comments etc. on any film should be recorded on the main entry for that film.

6.18 Technical Information. The following data should be recorded:

Title
Location number in store
Width (35mm, 16mm, etc.)
Length (in metres or feet)
Sound or Silent
Sound System
Colour or Black-and-White
Colour system
Positive or Negative
Type of base (nitrate, acetate, etc.)
Make of stock
Type of emulsion
Date of copy
Copy number (if known)
Date copy acquired
Source of copy
Results of tests
Shrinkage

7. How should the Information in the Catalogue be Arranged and Classified?

7.1 Proposition 1: The following information is most conveniently arranged in alphabetic sequence:

- (a) Main Entries (under title)
- (b) Proper names (of companies, directors, actors, etc.)

7.2 Proposition 2: Subject content can be classified either alphabetically or numerically.

7.21 Some of the advantages of an alphabetic arrangement of subjects are as follows:

- (a) Because members of the public are accustomed to an alphabetical arrangement in dictionaries, encyclopaedias and telephone directories, they will understand it immediately.
- (b) It enables subject contents, titles and proper names to be brought together in one continuous sequence, if this is considered desirable.

7.22 Some of the advantages of a numerical subject classification are as follows:

- (a) It enables closely related subjects to be brought together, so that the enquirer's immediate field of search is extended. If he cannot find what he first looked for, he may find an acceptable alternative in adjacent headings of the index.
- (b) It facilitates multiple indexing, by enabling several subject numbers to be co-ordinated. This is especially valuable for a non-abstract medium like the cinema, where one sequence of a film on China, for example, may simultaneously portray Chinese transport, costume, architecture, markets and carrying of children.
- (c) It can be understood in all countries, without need for translation. This is especially true of an internationally-accepted system, such as the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC).

7.3 Proposition 3: Whatever classification system is adopted, it should be one which is widely accepted and understood. Often inexperienced and unqualified persons are tempted to create their own classification systems, which they alone can understand. It is impossible to warn too strongly against such private systems.

7.4 Proposition 4: It is also important to give the fullest and most serious consideration to the choice of a classification system, because when it has been in use for a period of time, it becomes immensely difficult to change it.

8. In What Physical Form or Forms should the Catalogue be Recorded?

8.1 Proposition: An archive catalogue can be recorded in a variety of possible forms. For example:

- 8.11 On cards. Here the size and shape of the cards must be determined. There are also cards for various systems of information retrieval (e.g. punched cards, notched cards, etc.)
- 8.12 On sheets, bound into book form, with the possibility of changing the pages, or the individual entries, or both.
- 8.13 On microfilm.

8.14 On computer tape.

8.15 In printed books.

8.2 Comment: Several of these forms may be used simultaneously. For example, the National Film Archive in London uses loose-leaf books (the Kalamazoo system) for its Preliminary Catalogue, ordinary cards for both the main entries and the index headings of its Permanent Catalogue, and printed books for its published catalogue.

9. How Many Catalogues does an Archive Need for its Collections?

9.1 Proposition 1: It is possible for an archive to have separate catalogues for its films, for its stills, for its scripts, for its posters, and so on. Alternatively, one central catalogue can serve all purposes, by listing all the objects relating to a single film on one main entry. It is necessary for an archive to decide which of these two methods will serve it best.

9.2 Proposition 2: In this connection, it is important to distinguish between data which may change, and data which can never change. Such items as original title, producer, director, date, etc., once determined, remain fixed for ever. Technical information, on the other hand, relates to a particular film copy or copies held by the archive, and these copies may change. A nitrate copy may deteriorate, and have to be copied on to acetate; a 16mm copy may be replaced by a 35mm one; a longer, more complete version may be obtained from another archive; as a result of these or other changes, the location number in the store may also change. It would be inconvenient to have to replace or correct the whole of a main entry each time there was a change in the technical information. It might, therefore, be considered desirable to catalogue technical information separately, either in a different place altogether, or on cards different (and perhaps of a different colour) from those containing the permanent data.

10. How Far should a Catalogue record a Cataloguer's Critical Assessments?

10.1 Proposition: Students are often anxious to study particular uses of the camera, particular kinds of film editing, particular styles of acting, etc. They would be greatly assisted, and saved much unnecessary viewing, if such matters as these could also be recorded and indexed in the archive catalogue. We believe, however, that this is not the function of a catalogue, for the following reasons:

10.11 It would require cataloguers to make critical judgments and assessments which they may not be competent to make.

10.12 The traditional role of the cataloguer is to describe objective facts, and not to record his own subjective assessments.

10.13 However far such critical analysis went, it could never be complete.

- 10.14 It would tend to make the critical study of the archive's film collection too rigid and stereotyped, by inhibiting the student from exercising his own perception and imagination.
- 10.15 The place for such critical analyses is outside the catalogue, in reviews, criticisms, and other published studies.

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