

Holdings of US Film Productions in the  
National Film and Television Archive (London)

During its 58 years of existence, the National Film Archive (now the National Film and Television Archive) has acquired copies of some 6,600 US feature films and 1,950 documentaries. The bulk of these have generally been donated by the UK offices of US film distribution companies according to formal, signed agreements governing their use. Mostly, the films have been received in the form of used distribution prints, and/or in some cases duplicate negatives held in the UK to satisfy print needs.

Historically, a number of these films, particularly from the silent and early sound period, have been kept in the NFTVA as preservation material, pending assurance that better copies are being preserved elsewhere (ie in the USA). And indeed, occasionally American titles held in the UK have turned out to be unique copies and have been supplied back to the rights-owning film company for re-exploitation or to a US film archive for preservation in the country of origin.

Yet these holdings of US material have always been seen primarily as a research collection (and a very crucial one in terms of Anglo-American cultural influences); the more so as film archiving has evolved worldwide and national responsibilities towards preservation have been adopted on a greater scale, allowing the liberation of an increasing number of prints from preservation status to viewing and library use.

By the same token, however, wider and more frequent usage of these singular materials has led to a growing need to replace and enrich the research collection and add to it from preservation sources - which means, primarily, the US film archives. This is particularly important where an American film held uniquely in the UK (often on nitrate stock) has been repatriated to the US for permanent preservation and where the quid pro quo is the provision of a replenishable safety research print.

It is, therefore, of considerable importance to the UK, and the NFTVA in particular, that the recognised preservation film archives of the USA are seen as the primary and permanent source of all American cinema and are given the formal responsibility and necessary resources to perform this function.

*Clyde Jeavons*

CJ/NFTVA  
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AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION