



Press Release

25 October 2005

Charley says...

Central Office of Information celebrates 60th birthday

To celebrate the Central Office of Information's (COI) 60th birthday The National Archives in Kew is putting 60 of the organisation's most memorable television and cinema public information films online.

Since its formation in 1946 the COI has been using films to communicate important messages to the British public from Keep Britain Tidy campaigns through to raising awareness of HIV. In 1946 up to 15 million people would have seen the films which are now available online.

The National Archives has worked with the COI to identify the more popular films from the thousands in the COI collection. The 60 films will be digitised and released on The National Archives website in batches over the next six months.

The first batch of short films that can be viewed are at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films and date from 1945 to 1951. Highlights include Dr Richard Massingham informing the public on important issues such as how to blow your nose to stop the spread of germs. Other gems in the first stage of the collection include footage of the Berlin Airlift and an advert for visiting Commonwealth residents on how to behave on a London bus!

COI chief executive Alan Bishop said: 'This is a very exciting time for the Central Office of Information. We are celebrating our 60th anniversary by highlighting the best public information films of the past 60 years with the help of The National Archives.'

'These historic films led the way in communication, just as the ads and films we produce today are often pioneering or challenging both in creative approach and subject matter. Having the films available online provides a great social commentary that will be of interest to many.'

The first batch was originally shown on cinema screens, but as televisions became popular, the films became shorter and snappier and moved to people's living rooms.

Gavin Houtheusen of The National Archives said, 'Working with the COI on this project has been a lot of fun and brought back a lot of memories. Everyone can remember at least one (if not many) of these films, what lessons they learnt from them and the actions they took after watching the commercial.'

'The National Archives holds many public records about these films, and archives the COI's documents, so it was natural that we should form a partnership to work together.'

'In digitalising these films, The National Archives is demonstrating its commitment to making history available to the public online.'

The 1970s and 1980s adverts are some of the more memorable films created by the COI. The 'Charley Says' series where a cat warns children not to go with strangers and play with matches was so popular that its catch phrase was used in a club dance record in the early 1990s. The Green Cross Code advertisements starring Dave Prowse (aka the man in the Darth Vader costume in the original Star Wars movies) and Learn to Swim with Olympic winner David Wilkie all hold fond memories for a generation of adults who watched them as children. To view the first selection of adverts visit: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films

For more information and images contact:

Nicole Hambridge on 020 8392 5277 or email: Nicole.hambridge@nationalarchives.gov.uk

For more information on COI, contact:

Janice O'Reilly at COI on 020 7261 8763 or janice.oreilly@coi.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to Editors:

The National Archives, Kew, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history, from Domesday Book to newly released government papers. The free museum and research rooms are open to the public 6 days a week.

Over nine million records are available to view at Kew and some, including wills, First World War Army medal cards and Second World War Seamen's medal records are also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

The Family Records Centre, Islington, which is jointly managed by The National Archives and the Office for National Statistics, holds the indexes (not the certificates themselves) for births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from July 1837 and also copies of wills, before 1858, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and some other church courts.

COI works across government and with public sector bodies to deliver public information campaigns using a range of marketing services including advertising, direct marketing, PR, direct marketing, research, events and digital media and through a network of regional press offices.

Campaigns are unique – from targeting the entire UK population (e.g. preparing for emergencies) to reaching very specific groups (e.g. drug users or people with disabilities). Campaign objectives are often challenging – to effect social change, save lives or help to relieve poverty. COI is committed to helping achieve these aims through the most efficient and effective publicity campaigns.