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In the steps of the film pioneers



ON A MOUNTAIN IN SCOTLAND ▲

A camera crew shoots a scene from "In Touch" which describes how the Post Office is providing communications for the Scottish Highlands and Islands. It shows a trenching machine preparing the way for the burying of cable over rough moorland. This film is being shown to a wide audience.

THE POST OFFICE is in the communications business and it is not surprising that it uses a wide range of media to communicate with the general public and its staff. Since the early days of the "talking picture" the Post Office has used film to inform – and entertain – a huge audience. It was involved in the production of some of the first and most famous documentary and industrial films. Today, anything up to 20 telecommunications films may be in the course of production in any one year. They cover a wide variety of activities and are made with an equally wide variety of audiences in mind. Some have such general appeal and entertainment value that they are distributed by MGM/EMI and the Rank Organisation to support major feature films on general release. For example, the film "Communicate to Live", which is about data communication, was shown at London's Leicester Square Theatre along with "Catlow" starring Yul Brynner. The films seen

in cinemas, and others with a similar wide appeal, are also shown to film societies, clubs and schools. Others have a specific audience in mind – like business and professional organisations, or a particular group of Post Office staff. Most of them can be borrowed from Regional Public Relations Officers or from a number of film libraries throughout the country. Films are an effective means of reaching out to almost every section of a community, and large numbers of people can be kept informed of the kind of work the Post Office does. As well as describing the services available films can also advise people how to make the best use of services and equipment. And they can often be a good way of getting a message across to Post Office staff in training. Safety at work, for example, can be hammered home effectively on film by bringing a situation "alive" in words and pictures.

The films are made either by the Post Office's own small Cine Unit, operating under a professional director who is commissioned for each particular job, or alternatively, an entire production will be contracted out to a film company. Generally, films for wider showing lasting perhaps 20 to 30 minutes are contracted out while the five or ten-minute "quicky", very often for use inside the Post Office, is made by the Cine Unit.

Among current productions by outside companies are "The Badger Account", which is aimed at informing the business community about the proper use of telephone installations, and "The Grutzbacher Mem-

UNDER A BUSY ROAD IN OXFORD ►

The Post Office Cine Unit descends into a cable tunnel at Oxford to prepare a film about the trunk network which will be used for training and recruitment. The cameraman is in a child's pushchair and was pushed along the narrow gangway to obtain a tracking shot of the run of cables.

orandum" which is about telex. Also in the pipeline from the Post Office Cine Unit are a number of training films and two dealing with specific aspects of safety at work.

Although Post Office producers make a point of resisting any temptation to introduce artistry for art's sake, preferring instead to concentrate on achieving the objectives set by the business, their films have been attracting a number of creative awards at the major international festivals.

"Communicate to Live" was declared the best in its class at the British Industrial and Scientific Film Association's Festival, and was awarded a Certificate of Creative Excellence at the Fifth USA Industrial Film Festival in Chicago. "No Ordinary Cargo", which is about the work of a Post Office cableship, won a prize in the Geneva international festival and another award at BISFA.

The high standards set by the early pioneers are still very much in evidence in today's films.



It was in the early 1930s that the Post Office entered the world of movies and through the GPO Film Unit produced a series of documentaries now regarded by experts as among the all-time greats of their kind. With these pioneer movies the late Professor John Grierson, then head of the Unit, added a new dimension to the art of film – and a generation of talent.

"Night Mail", probably the best known of the documentary classics produced by Grierson, has music by Benjamin Britten and script by W H Auden, now major talents in their fields. And there were other little known names employed by the Unit who were also destined for fame, the most notable perhaps being writer J B Priestley.

Shortly after the start of the Second World War the Unit was taken over by the new Ministry of Information and made propaganda films for the Home Office, eventually changing its name to the Crown Film Unit. After the war films for the Post Office and other Government Departments were handled by the Central Office of Information. But in 1961 the Post Office again began making its own films and today the Publicity Division of Marketing Department controls film production for the Telecommunications Business. A similar organisation operates in the Postal Business for films with a postal theme.

ANCIENT AND MODERN ▶

"Communicate to Live" (see film strips) traces the history of man's attempts to communicate with his fellows, from the first written messages to the electronic revolution. It looks at the growing use of data communication and some possible future developments. These scenes show Faraday at work in his laboratory and a hospital operation, with information about the patient on a visual display unit.

