

Screening European Heritage: Final Summary Report

From *La Reine Margot* (1994) to *The King's Speech* (2010), historical dramas dominate mainstream European film production and often generate major national debates on the role of the past in contemporary national identity construction. Defined in the 1990s as “heritage films” by academics such as Andrew Higson, Belén Vidal and Claire Monk, who each became contributing members of this project, the makers of such films frequently work in partnership with the wider heritage sector in order to secure funding for their productions. And the films, along with the debates they generate, often shape the subsequent marketing and curatorial strategy of the heritage sites they foreground in their stories.

Led by the [Centre for World Cinemas](#) at the University of Leeds, in collaboration with [B-Film: The Birmingham Centre for Film Studies](#), Screening European Heritage explored the representation of Europe's past on contemporary screens, what this says about contemporary cultural attitudes to the past and how this reflects, and can be shaped by, the policies and practice of cultural institutions now and in the future. The project focussed on three interrelated questions:

- What role does European, national and regional cultural policy play in the production of heritage films and how do filmmakers negotiate such policy?
- How are heritage films consumed across and beyond Europe? Who is their audience? What are the mechanisms of their consumption and how do these mechanisms map onto those of the wider heritage industry?
- How do heritage films extend, or delimit, the possibilities of historical representation? How do their various modes of emotional engagement with history underline, or reflect tensions in, the aims of the heritage industry as a whole.

What we have done: Over the last year, the project team has been exploring these questions through discussions with a [network](#) of film scholars and industry professionals from across Europe. The ultimate aim of the project was to provide a scoping study for a wider investigation. With this in mind, we focussed largely on heritage films produced in the UK, the Basque Country, Denmark and Germany, all of which have very different film cultures and, most importantly, relationships with the past. In particular, we have explored the ways in which film engages Europe's troubled past, the legacy of war and the role of film as a vehicle for community and nation building.

The project has run two conferences with academic and industry professionals and a seminar series. The [first](#) of these was structured around a series of joint presentations between academics and colleagues working in the film and heritage sectors, during which we discussed the project's core research questions in order to ensure that our approach was informed by a genuine process of knowledge exchange. This was followed by a [second](#) conference towards the end of the project, where colleagues presented draft chapters for an edited book to emerge from the project. The conference included contributions from colleagues working in the UK, Turkey, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Finland, and Ireland and explored a whole range of issues, from film production to movie-induced tourism, and presented

a wide range of European heritage cinemas. The volume is to be submitted to Palgrave in the autumn of 2014.

Over the course of the year, the team has undertaken numerous [interviews](#) with project participants, the majority of which were conducted by Axel Bangert, the project's postdoctoral researcher, and all of which are published on the project website, either in written form or as audio or video podcasts. These include discussions with Professor Robert Burgoyne, a key figure in scholarship on historical film, and Gareth Unwin, producer of the Oscar-winning heritage film *The King's Speech* (2010).

All of these activities have fed into the project's [pilot study](#), which focusses on an investigation of Heritage film production in our chosen core countries. This is to be published in an edited volume on film, history and public memory. They have also helped to shape the project's own edited collection of essays, which explores a much wider array of national and transnational film cultures. Cooke and Stone have also been commissioned to produce a further chapter on Heritage cinema for a collection on "Slow Cinema" to be published by Edinburgh University Press. These outputs will appear in 2015.

As well as traditional academic outputs, the exploratory award also gave the team the opportunity to experiment with various forms of dissemination. The team produced a series of [video essays](#) focussed on the overarching questions the project has raised, as well as giving close readings of specific Heritage films. Stone also made two films: one a creative meditation on the relationship between film and tourism, [Between Sunrise and Sunless](#), that has registered several thousand plays on various Internet sites. Stone (director) and Bangert (camera) also made a documentary on [Basque Heritage Cinema](#)¹⁴ which has been invited to be screened at the universities of Pamplona, Cambridge, Queens Belfast and William and Mary in the USA.

As set out in the original project plan, the project also produced a [briefing paper](#) on its key findings. This was enhanced by the ongoing work of a cognate project on film and "Soft Power" with which Cooke is involved. The briefing paper [has been taken up as evidence by the House of Lords Select Committee on "Soft Power and the UK's Influence"](#).

Next Steps: The team has developed a number of follow-up projects. These include an application for a Care for the Future major award on the therapeutic potential of nostalgia, a British Academy application on the digital distribution of Heritage film and an application to undertake a "Critical Review" on Digital Heritage for the AHRC's Cultural Values theme. The team is also discussing ways of extending the documentary on Basque cinema, as well as a bid for follow-on funding to explore the potential of community film production as a tool that can engage heritage culture to provide new ways for individuals and communities to come to terms with their past and understand the relationship of this past to their present-day societal experience.

What we have learnt: The project team has delivered all the outputs set out in the original case for support. However, many of its most interesting outputs emerged organically over the course of the year. The format of the Care for the Future

exploratory award was particularly conducive to this process of organic development. The AHRC's willingness to recognise and incorporate the synergetic research of Stone on Basque cinema via funding from The Leverhulme Trust also enabled a collaborative research environment that was entirely to the benefit of the project. The organic and evolving nature of the project as a whole was conducive to the incorporation of interest from many sectors, individuals and organisations, who each helped direct the project to its end and to promising new avenues of enquiry. The theme resonated very clearly with project partners in the academic, filmmaking and heritage sectors and this has led to several "breakout" projects and outputs that could not have been realised with a more restrictive framework.