

Channel 4 and British Film Culture Conference

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Channel 4 and the Rediscovery of Old Movies on Television

Sheldon Hall, Sheffield Hallam University

Although from its inception Channel 4 has been actively involved in the production of new cinema films ultimately intended for showing on television, it has also been responsible for the rediscovery of literally thousands of older movies. The channel's remit, of providing an alternative to the material offered by the other broadcasters, extended to screening feature films older than the BBC and ITV would usually accept. Leslie Halliwell, compiler of cinema reference books and film buyer for the ITV network, was also responsible for purchasing and programming classic Hollywood and British films for Channel 4, in the process freeing many titles from the vaults for the first time in decades and striking new 35mm prints of films hitherto unavailable. In the 1980s and 1990s, particularly, Channel 4 offered film enthusiasts extensive retrospective seasons and occasional special events, such as the presentation by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill of silent films with newly commissioned scores that were initially performed live at the London Film Festival and elsewhere before appearing on television. This paper assesses the channel's contribution to British film culture and film scholarship through this curatorial function.