

SERIES LEVEL DESCRIPTION
TELEVISION DOCUMENTARIES (T4)**Scope & Content**

The papers relate to the creation of each documentary programme, potentially covering items from the initial proposal, through the arrangements for filming and editing, to the broadcast stage. Some files are more complete in this respect than others. In addition to correspondence, they can include such items as budget documents, clearances, Programmes as Completed, research notes, interview transcripts, press releases, audience research reports and scripts.

The papers include correspondence and official paperwork from the following sources: producers, directors, writers and other production staff; Head of Documentaries, Television; Head of Films, Television; Film Organiser, Television; Controller Programmes, Television; various departments within the BBC including Finance, Presentation, Publicity, Film Library & Outside Broadcasts; contributors to programmes; outside agencies, such as film processing laboratories and unions.

Archival History

The papers were originally filed in the Television Central Registry, where they were assessed for retention, and this was the immediate source of acquisition for the bulk of the files. Later material came via the Records Management Centre and the Records and Programme Information Centre (RAPIC).

Arrangement

The files are arranged alphabetically by title for the initial sequence of material (T4/1-76) covering the period to c.1956. This conforms to their original registry sequence.

The later accruals (T4/77-96) are filed in numerical order and consist of some additional files from the 1950s (T4/77-85, 88) and a few from the 1960s (T4/86-87) and 1990s (T4/89-96).

A complete alphabetical listing of the files in this series is available, as are detailed precis for each file (in numerical order).

Related Areas

Please note that the period 1966-1970 is covered by TV Documentaries Department (T56), with the exception of one 1968 file - T4/86 Fifty Years of the RAF. Similarly, the 1970s and 1980s are covered by Documentary Features (T64). There may also be some files of interest in the TV Talks series (T32).

BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES CENTRE

Administrative History

Early BBC television documentaries were often dramatised accounts of events or situations. The first conventional documentary, combining real filmed sequences and studio interviews, was Robert Barr's *Report From Germany* (1948). Barr was a producer in the newly formed Documentaries and Magazine Programmes group (formed in 1948), which also employed the first full time documentary scriptwriter, Duncan Ross. It was reorganised into the Documentary Programmes unit in 1953, under Paul Rotha, but was dissolved in 1955. During its existence, however, this small department produced a wide variety of documentaries, and it is these that form the bulk of the T4 files.

Between 1955 and 1962 there was no separate documentary making unit (broadly speaking it was the responsibility of the Talks Group), hence the sparseness of material from this period.

One of the few exceptions is Richard Cawston's *This is the BBC* (1959), originally created as a publicity film for non-theatrical release, but later broadcast on TV. It was significant for its lack of commentary, fast pace, and closing sequence using (still experimental) colour vision.

In 1963 a Documentary and Music Programmes unit re-emerged as part of the Talks Group, under the leadership of Huw Wheldon. In 1965 this was succeeded by Documentary Programmes, headed by Richard Cawston (it was also at this time that the Talks Group ceased to exist). The department became known as Documentary Features in 1981, and just Documentaries from 1992. It is presumably this very general title that accounts for a few files from the early 1990s being added to the T4 series.

c. 5810 items

103 files

1939, 1946 - 1965, 1968, 1972 - 1973, 1988 - 1990, [1993 - 1994]