As well as being a fascinating resource for anyone interested in the past, the archive has special value to museums and broadcasters as well as academics and researchers. Recently, film-makers from France and from the USA have found important resources for programmes on the Second World War. A short film of children from Hove putting on gas masks has become emblematic of life in wartime Britain for a global audience. By engaging with local communities, national and international museums and broadcasters SASE has developed new public audiences for contemporary and historical screen culture that have generated over £1.8m in income, with total audiences exceeding 25 million.

The past decade has seen a revolutionary change in how film archives operate with the arrival of the internet. “Being part of a networked world has transformed every aspect of our work,” said Dr Gray. “When the archive was established in 1992, if you wanted to see our films you physically came to where we were. An AHRC grant helped us build a digital catalogue and present some of our content online, which was a fundamentally important step: sharing our collection online means that serendipitous things happen.”

From rural life to seaside holidays and from wartime information to peacetime celebrations, a unique record of life in south-east England has been collected, preserved, curated and made available through Screen Archive South East (SASE) and its Director Dr Frank Gray, a member of the University of Brighton’s College of Arts and Humanities.

“The interesting thing about a film archive is the number of different ways in which it’s used,” said Dr Gray. “There’s an assumption that a film archive serves the needs of film historians, but the reality is that we transcend the specificities of film and film history and serve multiple histories, whether it’s domestic and social history, or rural and agricultural history, or military and conflict history.”

Brighton has provided a moving past for the region, the nation and beyond. There are many ways of accessing the past but moving images offer a unique insight into how we lived our lives during the twentieth century. One of the University of Brighton’s leading art and film historians has been instrumental in opening up the world of film through Screen Archive South East.

As well as being a fascinating resource for anyone interested in the past, the archive has special value to museums and broadcasters as well as academics and researchers. Recently, film-makers from France and from the USA have found important resources for programmes on the Second World War. A short film of children from Hove putting on gas masks has become emblematic of life in wartime Britain for a global audience. By engaging with local communities, national and international museums and broadcasters SASE has developed new public audiences for contemporary and historical screen culture that have generated over £1.8m in income, with total audiences exceeding 25 million.

From rural life to seaside holidays and from wartime information to peacetime celebrations, a unique record of life in south-east England has been collected, preserved, curated and made available through Screen Archive South East (SASE) and its Director Dr Frank Gray, a member of the University of Brighton’s College of Arts and Humanities.

“The interesting thing about a film archive is the number of different ways in which it’s used,” said Dr Gray. “There’s an assumption that a film archive serves the needs of film historians, but the reality is that we transcend the specificities of film and film history and serve multiple histories, whether it’s domestic and social history, or rural and agricultural history, or military and conflict history.”
Frank Gray’s public activities through his leadership of Screen Archive South East and Cinecity have brought film alive to the city of Brighton and Hove and have been a driver for the city’s ongoing success in all aspects of the film cluster. Frank has nurtured a public/private sector partnership that was successful in making Brighton and Hove the centre for the audience development of cultural cinema in the South East.

Donna Close, Head of Arts, Royal Pavilion, Arts & Museum

One interesting example is a film-maker from Germany who came to live in England in the late 1930s but who returned to Germany after the war. The Dresden International Short Film Festival presented a retrospective of Peter Sachs’ work and the web catalogue provided the vital link. “It turns out that one of his very earliest films was created for a tinned meat and fish firm in Chichester, and without our online presence the creators of the retrospective would never have come across this unique film.”

The link with higher education is critical for a film archive’s core research and pedagogical function. As an art and film historian, Dr Gray is constantly focused on the many and varied histories contained in the archive. “Each film represents so many things and since the vast majority of our films are non-fiction, they are intimately engaged with aspects of everyday life, and of commemoration, so they’re the perfect complement to other archival sources such as paper archives, oral histories and even archaeology.”

The role of the archive is multi-faceted and inspirational, as well as representing solid intellectual and academic capital. “We’re opening doors to different histories and making connections,” said Dr Gray. “We’re making people inquisitive about their past, we’re articulating history through the moving image, and we’re providing a resource for teaching and research, for museums and for artists.”