

29. Storing Apples

In this piece, Caroline Gould, Principal Archivist at The MERL, uses the example of this 1951 film drawn from the Ministry of Agriculture film library as a route into describing examples from the wider collection and exploring how and why we have been working harder in recent years to digitise, preserve, and catalogue these extraordinary resources.

Colour film, Storage of Apples, 1951



Still showing apple grading from the colour film *Storage of Apples*, made in 1951 (MERL TR MAFF PH6/73).

This film is an instructional and educational film created to inform producers of new methods of apple storage. The film shows apple orchard with pickers, and the orchard in winter. Apple storage methods are also shown: straw clamp in the open air; barns below ground level; Ditton Laboratory experimental apple storage. The correct handling of apples also feature: careful picking of apples, the packing station, grading machinery, removal of rotten fruit, and the wrapping of produce in oiled wrapping. The film was made in 1951 and was sponsored and distributed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Storage of Apples forms part of the Ministry of Agriculture film library collection held in the archives at The MERL. The collection consists of 288 16mm 'reel to reel' films. These were often commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture but sometimes the films were made by other organisations and deposited with the Ministry of Agriculture to influence producers, farmers, and the general public. Interestingly, not all of the films are in the English language. At The MERL we have often speculated

as to how the reels were shown. Were they lent to individuals and shown in village halls? Did the Ministry visit with film reels to show an invited audience? Were some even sent abroad?



Still from *Storage of Apples* – the film gives little away as to where it was screened (MERL TR MAFF PH6/73).

The collection covers all aspects of farming. Many of the films are very technical, some show new methods of working, and some are quite graphic if you have not worked on a farm. Here are just a few choice examples of films held in this collection (click on the record number to watch each film on our Virtual Reading Room). *Poultry on the General Farm* (MERL TR MAFF PH6/41) is a film made in 1949, which shows selection, rearing, housing, management, and feeding of poultry.



Still showing a henhouse, taken from *Poultry on the General Farm* (MERL TR MAFF PH6/41).

Ditching is a Ministry of Information film made in 1942 showing ditching by hand by two men ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/47](#)).



Title sequence from the Ministry of Information film *Ditching* ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/47](#)).



Hand tools demonstrated in *Ditching* also feature in The MERL object collection ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/47](#)).

Some of the films relate to dealing with the introduction of mechanisation. *A Way to Plough* ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/2](#)) was made in 1941 and shows women from the Women's Land Army showing the most efficient and economical way to plough the land including illustrated diagrams.



The Women's Land Army demonstrate tractor ploughing in *A Way to Plough* ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/2](#)).

Mechanical Handling: Mechanised Sugar Beet Harvesting was made in 1962 which shows the use of mechanisation to reduce labour costs. ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/147](#)).



This still shows a cartoon-style sequence from *Mechanical Handling* ([MERL TRMAFF PH6/147](#)).

Other films cover cattle or crop management. For example, the 1948 film *Britain's Livestock* was focussed on increased production and maintaining the excellence of livestock ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/115](#)).



A couple of 'absolute units' take a look around in this still from *Britain's Livestock* ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/115](#)).

Potato Growing was made in 1946 shows methods of planting potatoes largely using hand labour ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/132](#)).



This image shows the back-breaking manual work of a team of potato pickers in *Potato Growing* ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/132](#)).

There are also films dealing with a range of disease, foot and mouth, twin lamb disease, scrapie, gastrointestinal worms, and brucellosis. *Fowl Typhoid* is a film that shows the effects, prevention, and cure of fowl typhoid ([MERL TR MAFF PH6/31](#)).



This still shows the stylised title and credit sequence of *Fowl Typhoid* (TR MAFF PH6/31).

The MERL has recently supported a four-year project funded by the Wellcome Trust, led by Abigail Woods and called *FIELD: Farm-Level Interdisciplinary approaches to Endemic Livestock Disease*. It brings together a team of social scientists, historians, economists, and epidemiologists to research how livestock disease is influenced by nature and culture, science and society, and the actions of humans and livestock. The project is focusing on Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) in cows, and lameness in sheep and cattle.

The MERL's contribution to the project included selecting, digitising, and cataloguing photographic negatives and prints to assist the project research team. We also digitised film from the Ministry of Agriculture's film library and undertook copyright research on the films.



This image shows canisters containing original 'reel to reel' films, as held in storage at The MERL.

Some of the 16mm ‘reel to reel’ films were first copied to VHS in 2003 and a second, Betacam SP preservation copy was also made. In 2008, the majority of the films were transferred to DVD and then Digibeta. We have worked with Beaulieu Motor Museum Film Unit for many years preserving our archive film. The latest project has provided digital copies in mpg format for viewing and for preservation, and an uncompressed 10 bit YUV file. We hope this is the last time we will have to copy the films to a new medium. Instead, we will now be concentrating on storing and preserving these digital surrogates.

The copyright research was complicated. There are many parties who can have a claim to copyright of a film. The production company, the director, the producer, the actors, and those who made the music. Not all the films were commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, so it was a complex process to establish the rights inherent within each individual film. The research was largely undertaken by Laura Luca, Archive Assistant (Oct 2020–April 2021). We also received assistance from the British Film Institute and the National Archives.

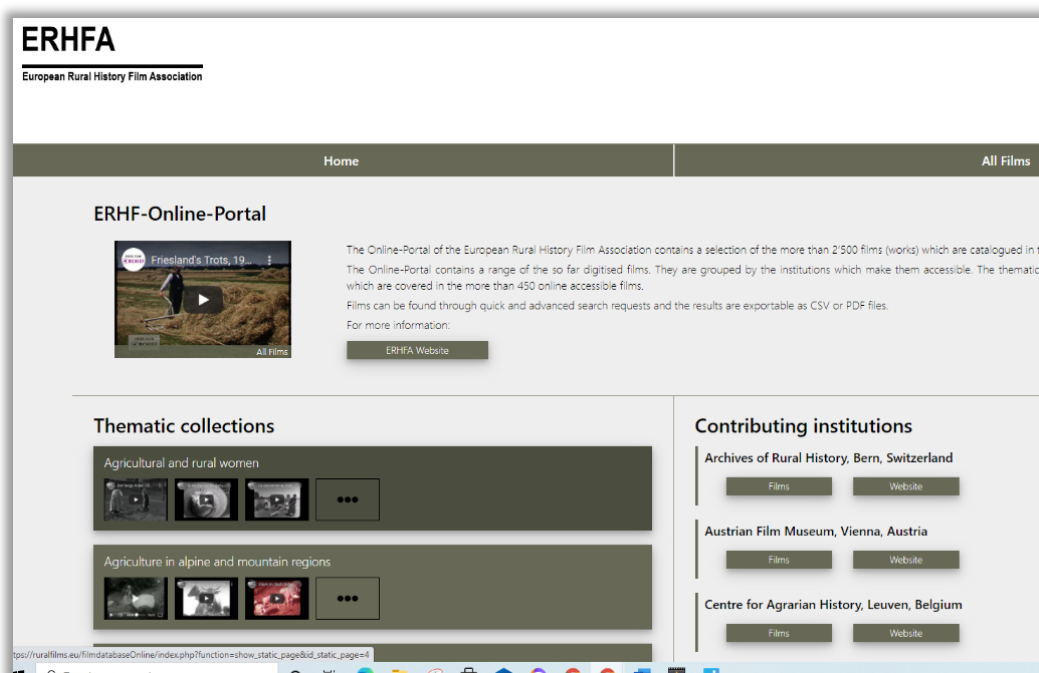
We found that the films largely fell into 4 categories:

- Contains public sector information licensed under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#).
- Crown Copyright. Authority to licence or re-use is delegated to the British Film Institute. This expires after 70 years.
- Copyright is held by an organisation that is still in existence.
- Copyright is held by an organisation that we haven’t been able to trace.

We have now added this information to our collections database so that it is accessible to researchers. Those films that are no longer in copyright or licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0 are now available on The MERL’s [Virtual Reading Room](#). Those that remain in copyright or are not copyright cleared will be available for research on dedicated terminals in the Reading Room at The MERL by the end of 2021.

The MERL is currently working with artists on a follow up project to the FIELD project, including visual artist Shane Finan, documentary filmmaker Mark Jones, and artist and photographer Michele Allen.

After the copyright research was completed on the Ministry of Agriculture films, we were then able to contribute descriptions of these film works to the [European Rural History Film Database](#). This is managed by a non-profit organisation called the [European Rural History Film Association](#). It promotes the documentation, conservation, and study of all aspects concerning films on rural history. The ERHFA maintains a database of over 2500 film descriptions and an Online Portal with over 450 accessible films. 82 of The MERL’s films are now available on the online portal



This is a screenshot showing the European Rural History Film Association's online portal.

Other partners in the ERHFA include:

- Archives of Rural History, Bern, Switzerland
- Austrian Film Museum, Vienna, Austria
- Centre for Agrarian History, Leuven, Belgium
- Cinémathèque Suisse, Lausanne, Switzerland
- Electronic Media Centre, Bern, Switzerland
- Frisian Film and Audio Archive, Leeuwarden, Netherlands
- Institute for Sound and Vision, Hilversum, Netherlands
- Médiathèque Valais, Martigny, Switzerland
- Research Institute of Organic Agriculture, Frick, Switzerland
- SRF, Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen, Zürich, Switzerland

We were able to export The MERL film descriptions from our collections database. The database was then manipulated in excel for import into the ERHFA database. This element was more complex than I had initially thought. Our data is held in a general collections database, so a lot of the film descriptions are held in general fields, whereas the data held in the ERHFA database is especially for film data. This means that there are separate fields for:

- Sponsor
- Production Company
- Contributors
- Geographical focus

Another aspect of the ERHFA database that required the data be amended were the copyright statements. ERHFA use the [12 Rights Statements](#) developed and outlined for the needs of cultural heritage institutions. I owe a huge thank you to Andreas Wigger from the Archives of Rural History, Bern, who assisted me throughout this process.

It has been very rewarding to focus on this collection over the last 18 months and to carry out work made possible by the FIELD project funding. Our journey with preserving archive film that we hold at The MERL is still not over. We have more archive film that need to be digitised, catalogued, and copyright research undertaken to allow researchers access and to ensure preservation of the film for future generations. For example, we are currently trying to establish who holds the copyright for the National Dairy Council and Milk Marketing Board. Answers on a postcard (or in an email) please!

Further Information (online):

For more information about the Storing of Apples film – [MERL TR MAFF PH6/73](#); watch the film on the [Virtual Reading Room](#)

For a compilation of clips from lots of the Ministry of Agriculture films see – <https://youtu.be/3Vz6co4scEA>

For about the FIELD project see – <https://field-wt.co.uk/>

For more about the European Rural History Film Database see – <https://ruralfilms.eu/database/>

For more about the European Rural History Film Association see – <https://ruralfilms.eu/>

For more about Beaulieu's services see – <https://nationalmotormuseum.org.uk/enquiries/commercial-services/>