



Press Release

29 March 2006

Charley says... "I'm the Nation's Favourite Public Information Film"

The ginger moggie who taught generations of children not to go with strangers or play with matches has been voted as the Nation's Favourite Public Information Film.

A 'Public Information Film Festival' has been running on BBC News Magazine Website, in association with The National Archives and The Central Office of Information (COI), where visitors have been able to view some of the most memorable Public Information Films from the past 60 years. Over 25,000 people have logged on and voted for their favourite film from a short list of 23 which included Tufty the Squirrel, Clunk Click with Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris teaching children how to swim.

Charley received 9,100 of the votes to win the prestigious title of being The Nation's Favourite. In total, six Charley films were made, including 'Don't Play with Matches', 'Don't Go with Strangers' and 'Mummy Should Know'. The voice of the cat was recorded by the late comedian Kenny Everett and first screened on television in 1973. A generation of children grew up on the 'Charley says' films as they were screened into the 80s, and the iconic catchphrase was used in a dance record in the early 90s.

COI has been making public information films since the government body was formed in 1946 and BBC News Magazine website's film festival was part of a pledge by The National Archives, Kew, to exhibit some of the most memorable films online to celebrate COI's 60th anniversary. Visitors to www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films will be able to view Charley and the 22 films it pipped to the post, as well as a further 67 films that have been shown on television and in cinemas over the past 60 years.

Public Information Films have been used to communicate important messages to the nation for the past 60 years, from simple messages telling children how to cross the road through to more hard-hitting information about how to survive a nuclear bomb. Originally shown in cinemas, the films are a brilliant example of social commentary, highlighting the important social issues of the day. With the growth of TV in the 1950s, the films became shorter and snappier, delivering memorable messages that are now household phrases such as 'Cough and Sneezes spread diseases', 'Don't Drink and Drive', and 'Clunk Click'. Today's films reflect issues facing individuals today, from climate change to how to shop safely on the Internet. For children, the anti-bullying campaign has been very successful and reached number 13 in the Nation's Favourite vote, highlighting its important messages.

COI chief executive Alan Bishop said, 'The response to the voting on BBC Online has been terrific. We know that people hold very fond memories of the films. The comments made on BBC Online show that these films worked and had a real affect on people's lives.'

'Charley the cat is a great example of the importance of the films we produce and I'm delighted that he has been voted "The Nation's Favourite".'

Gavin Houtheusen from The National Archives said, 'Here at The National Archives in Kew we are focused on making as much as possible of the material we hold available to the public through the internet. The Public Information Films exhibition shows the face of Britain from the past 60 years – a complete social commentary of the issues facing individuals from Land's End to John O'Groats. There is a film on the exhibition for everyone, from driving to swimming, from building new towns to bullying.'

Giles Wilson from BBC News Magazine Website said, 'Featuring the Public Information Film Festival online has been great fun for all of us. The response from people visiting the festival was fantastic and the huge volume of votes we received was among our best.'

'Our own particular favourite was Reginald Molehusband – the film which has mysteriously gone missing from everyone's archives. Its appearance at number 6 in the rankings is fantastic – it shows how enduring the memories of these films really are.'

To view Charley, the top twenty Public Information Films and more, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films

Additional Notes:

- The results of the Public Information Film Votes were as follows:
 1. Charley Says
 2. Tufty the Squirrel
 3. Joe and Petunia
 4. Dark and Lonely Water
 5. Green Cross Man
 6. Reginald Molehusband
 7. Protect and Survive
 8. Learn to Swim - Rolf Harris
 9. Clunk Click - Jimmy Savile
 10. Teenager learns to swim
 11. Think Bike
 12. Play Safe - Frisbee
 - 13 = Fireworks - Hale and Pace
Bullying - Tell someone
 15. Splink - Jon Pertwee
 16. Close to the Edge
 17. Jobs for Girls
 18. TV Licence - Columbo
 - 19: Disused fridges
 20. Rabies warning
 21. Litter Defence Volunteers
 22. Think Bubble
- Download some public information history from www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/films
Available in iPod, PSP format and as Podcasts:
 1. Charley - Strangers (1973)
 2. Charley's Tea Party (1973)
 3. Children's Heroes – Kevin Keegan (1976)
 4. Joe and Petunia – Coastguard (1968)
 5. Green Cross Code Man (1970)
- COI and British Film Institute are hosting a COI film season with around 12 screenings at the National Film Theatre this autumn. The programme of films is being produced under various themes such as Britain Overseas, Health, Charley Says, and Famous Names and Faces.

For more information on the Public Information Films, images and copies, please contact:

- Nicole Hambridge at The National Archives, Kew, on 020 8392 5277 or email: Nicole.hambridge@nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Kate Tonge at COI on 020 7261 8306 or email: kate.tonge@coi.gsi.gov.uk

Notes to Editors:

The National Archives, Kew, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk has one of the largest archival collections in the world, spanning 1000 years of British history, from Domesday Book to newly released government papers. The free museum and research rooms are open to the public 6 days a week.

Over nine million records are available to view at Kew and some, including wills, First World War Army medal cards and Second World War Seamen's medal records, are also available online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

The Family Records Centre, Islington, which is jointly managed by The National Archives and the Office for National Statistics, holds the indexes (not the certificates themselves) for births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from July 1837 and also copies of wills, before 1858, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) and some other church courts.

COI works across government and with public sector bodies to deliver public information campaigns using a range of marketing services including advertising, direct marketing, PR, direct marketing, research, events and digital media and through a network of regional press offices.

Campaigns are unique – from targeting the entire UK population (e.g. preparing for emergencies) to reaching very specific groups (e.g. drug users or people with disabilities). Campaign objectives are often challenging – to effect social change, save lives or help to relieve poverty. COI is committed to helping achieve these aims through the most efficient and effective publicity campaigns.