

Professor Vanessa Toulmin:



Short Abstract:

No Fixed Abode - the Story of the National Fairground Archive and Archiving the Transitory and Ephemeral

Vanessa will look at how the story of the NFA reflects both the journey of a collection that records and archives the community from which it comes to being a living archive which co-produces, collaborates and celebrates the role and prominence of illegitimate entertainment culture both past and present. She will also present footage of this journey through archive film held by the NFA, visual material and will discuss how they are celebrating this journey in its 20th year with an extensive programme of outreach covering film, variety, circus fairgrounds and magic. Vanessa will also talk about the use of archive film in both its outreach, commercial and research policy and the challenges this material poses in relation to other types and formats held by the NFA.

Bio:

Professor Vanessa Toulmin is Director of the National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield Library and Chair in Early Film and Popular Entertainment. She is a leading authority on Victorian entertainment and film, and has completed extensive research on travelling showpeople. She also acts as a leading authority on new variety and circus and has acted as creative advisor to leading festivals in the United Kingdom including the Roundhouse in London and Showzam in Blackpool. Her publications and projects include the Electric Edwardians: the Story of the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection with the BFI, Visual Delights, Pleasurelands and her four volume series on Blackpool's heritage. She has presented over 200 early archive films showing relating to both the Mitchell & Kenyon Collection locally nationally and internationally and has programmed and presented at silent film festivals in Italy, Germany, Luxembourg and the United States.

She was awarded a personal chair in 2007 and celebrated this achievement with an inaugural lecture titled "Professor Vanessa's Performing Wonders": The Intermediality of Early Film and Popular Entertainment which included live performances from Miss Behave, the Insect Circus, Marisa Carnesky the Danger Boys and musical accompaniment by Stephen Horne.

Professor Toulmin's work has been published in internationally recognised journals and she has submitted articles on early film, Edwardian and Victorian entertainments and popular culture, the history of freak shows, carnivals and British fairgrounds and the culture and society of travelling showpeople. She has also curated many major exhibitions including a national touring exhibition on the history of travelling fairs for the Sheffield Millennium Galleries, Croydon ClockTower and Edinburgh Arts Centre and currently runs the Exhibition Gallery in Western Bank Library for the University. She has also acted as Special Advisor to two Government Select Committees on travelling fairs and gypsy sites.

Professor Toulmin also acts as producer and consultant on heritage and performance history and has worked since 2007 with Blackpool Council as special advisor on heritage and regeneration. This included the commissioning of four books celebrating the history of Blackpool including the Winter Gardens, Blackpool Pleasure Beach, The Tower and the Illuminations and working as historical consultant to English Heritage and the Council on the purchase of the Winter Gardens. . Until March 2013 she was the creative director of Showzam: Blackpool's annual festival of Circus Magic and New Variety but left this year in order to take on the role as Head of Engagement for the University of Sheffield working directly for the Vice Chancellor on public engagement with research and the civic university.