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John Cura: Pioneer of the Television Archive  
- Dr Richard Wallace (University of Warwick)

Abstract:

This article examines the work of John Cura, a freelance photographer who took over half a million still images of British television programmes between 1947 and 1968. Called Tele-snaps, these photographs constitute an archive of British television from a period where only a limited quantity of programme material survives. Based on papers relating to Cura’s work, available in the BBC’s Written Archive Centre, the article details the development of Cura’s relationship with the BBC as a freelancer, from his speculative attempts at securing clients in the late 1940s to his longstanding contractual work with production offices throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Cura’s interactions with the BBC also shed light on the development of British television in the period before 1970. The article documents the changes that took place in the BBC’s photographic department in the early 1950s, when photographs for presentation and archival purposes ceased, as well as the concern that the Tele-snaps caused the BBC’s legal team by raising questions about television images and copyright. In doing so the article raises questions about the way television was valued by those that made it, given that Cura was able to sustain a successful business for twenty years by creating a lasting record of a wide range of television programmes, many of which no longer exist in the BBC’s archive.

Author’s Details

Email address: Richard.wallace@warwick.ac.uk

Postal address (work): Department of Film and Television Studies, University of Warwick, Millburn House, Coventry, CV4 7HS

Postal address (home): 17 Eagle Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV31 2AG

Telephone number (work): 02476 151143

Telephone number (mobile): 07745 520391
Biographical Note

Dr Richard Wallace has research interests in aspects of British film and television history, particular the ways in which historical research can cast light on contemporary technological, social and theoretical transformations. Richard has additional interests in the mockumentary form, international documentary and screen comedy. He is currently Research Fellow on the AHRC-funded Projection Project at the University of Warwick.

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Dr Richard Wallace agrees to this submission and can confirm that the article is not currently being considered for publication by any other journal.