The Indian Review - Grand March past of the Forty Indian Regiments & Indian Bands for Wembley  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1902 & 1924

These rare films feature two of the earliest representations of South Asian people on screen held by the BFI National Archive. Queen Alexandra reviews Indian and other colonial troops marching at what appears to be Horse Guards Parade; while in Wembley, Punjabi and Baluchi musicians of an unidentified military band are inspected by Colonel Mackenzie Rogan in preparation for their appearance at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.

Cosmopolitan London  
Dir: Frank Miller & Harry B. Parkinson | UK | 1924

Despite the racially insensitive intertitles, this is an extraordinary tour of a multicultural London rarely acknowledged by early filmmakers. In this extract we visit the Strangers' Home for Asiatics in Limehouse Pier.

Islam in London & Moslem Festival at Woking  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1926 & 1928

A momentous occasion in Southfields as the Fazl Mosque, the first to be purpose-built in London, is opened in an official ceremony. The significance of the event was recognised in the national press, with The Times reporting: “The occasion is one of great importance in the history of religious movements outside Christianity in this country.” The Fazl Mosque was not Britain's first, however. Woking's Shah Jahan Mosque, shown in the second of these films, was built in 1889 and remained a central Islamic hub within the UK for much of the 20th century.

Indian 11th Republic Day Celebrations at Leicester  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1959

In January 1959, Indian Independence Day is celebrated with a dance display and cold buffet in the city of Leicester. Lord Mayor Sidney Brown welcomes members of the city’s small but thriving Asian communities, well before Leicester became known as one of the most multicultural cities in the UK.

Trev’s 21st  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1963

It’s the early 1960s and time to twist again at this house party celebrating ‘Trev’s’ 21st birthday. Party-goers play vinyl records and perform popular dance craze ‘the twist’. This fun film is a snapshot of multicultural life in London, with the guests displaying an eclectic mix of fashions from traditional saris to hip skinny ties.

Asian Pub Landlord  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1968

Hans Raj Dhanjal from Wolverhampton is the first Asian pub landlord in the Midlands and, like all landlords, he’s not just there to pull pints but to offer a friendly ear to his customers and help solve their problems.

Ugandan Asians at Houndstone Camp  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1972

TV reporter John Doyle is at Houndstone, near Yeovil in Somerset, to report on Ugandan Asian refugee as they settle into the South West's resettlement camps. Having been brutally expelled from Uganda by then dictator Idi Amin, they are interviewed about their hopes and prospects for a future in Britain. Over 27,000 refugees were successfully resettled in the UK. More recently, some have returned to Africa to rebuild their lives there.

Britain’s Empire in India was mobilised to assist with both military and industrial efforts during World War Two. In these extracts we see Indian soldiers of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps being inspected by political officials; followed by the managed expansion of Indian industry – eventually abandoned following the imminent threat of Japanese invasion from 1942.
A Sikh Wedding in Exeter  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1971

Taking place in the Gurdwara Temple in Exeter, this traditional wedding sees the groom arrive on horseback in beautiful ceremonial costume carrying a kirpan (sword) and accompanied by members of his family.

Courtesy of The South West Film and Television Archive.

Immigration Control  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1978

Then Coventry MP William Wilson is one of the contributors outlining tales of heartache from across the Midlands, as UK immigration laws leave families estranged from one another. None tug at the heart strings more than the man who, years before DNA testing was discovered, is tragically unable to prove that his son really is his boy.

Courtesy of Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln.

Asian Fashions & Asian Jewellery  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1976 & 1978

Family-run sari and jewellery workshops are the focus of these two captivating films that demonstrate British South Asian people's changing approaches to traditional dress and the original customs behind it.

Courtesy of Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln.

Sikh Games  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1979

Gian Singh Cheema is a star of the West Midlands weightlifting scene, but it's not just strength on show at this Kabaddi competition at Hadley Stadium on the outskirts of Birmingham. A local police officer is on hand to describe the rules of this energetic Asian team game; the national sport of Bangladesh and popular across the whole of South Asia.

Courtesy of Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln.

A Safe Place to Be & Defending a Way of Life  
Dir: Simon Heaven | UK | 1980

These fascinating extracts from pioneering documentary series ‘Home from Home’ explore the experiences of the Bangladeshi migrants to the East End in the late 1970s – in particular, the barriers and hostilities faced by first generation Bangladeshis and the changes the second generation's youth aimed to bring about.

With special thanks to the Heaven Estate.

A Mosque in the Park [1973]  
Dir: Yavar Abbas | UK | 1973

An insightful, sometimes humorous look at the lives of four Muslim families from different parts of India and Pakistan, exploring how they maintain their faith and traditions in British Asian communities in Manchester and London.

Courtesy of FremantleMedia Limited.

Arts Centre  
Dir: Unknown | UK | 1980

At Cannon Hill Park in Birmingham, the Midlands Arts Centre (now mac) reverberates to the sounds of Asian music, as a group of young people take their first tentative steps in learning Bharathanatiyam dance.

Courtesy of Media Archive for Central England at the University of Lincoln.

I’m British But...  
Dir: Gurinder Chadha | UK | 1989

Before she hit the big time with Bend it Like Beckham, Gurinder Chadha made this fascinating documentary on what it meant to be a young British Asian in the 1980s. The young people interviewed are from across the UK and offer differing views about what being Asian and British means for them, underscored by the beats of Bhangra and Bangla music.

Keep an eye out for the forthcoming Britain on Film location crowdsourcing platform, to share your stories and continue the debate on what we can learn from our national history.

All films courtesy of BFI National Film & Television Archive unless stated otherwise.

For more information about the Britain on Film Tour please contact: jemma.buckley@independentcinemaoffice.org.uk