

What is THE ASHER ARCHIVE ?



The Asher Archive is a unique resource focusing on the representation of childhood and adolescence through world cinema (and, to a lesser extent, television) from 1895 to the present day. It is not a film archive in the conventional sense, but a research project and database taking film as a mirror of society's fluctuating attitudes to children. The Archive is interested in the social politics of childhood and adolescence, of education and the family, and explores these themes critically through the medium of world cinema.



All archive documents are compiled in MSWord using a Mac G4 and scanned images prepared with Adobe Photoshop. Over 60,000 stills, supporting several thousands of documents, are currently available to members, and the database is expanding daily. The Asher Archive is an independent, non-commercial body established in 1986.

Collating published material from a huge range of sources, individual files are maintained on **every** known film or TV programme which meets the central criteria (see below), along with biographical files on **every** known child or adolescent actor, as well as

directors of special interest. These files are updated regularly as additional material becomes available.

This core material, reviewing individual films and TV programmes, then serves as the basis for separate illustrated essays and annotated listings which discuss a broad variety of relevant themes or areas of focus. Such headings include, for example, Boarding Schools; Orphans / Adoption / Children's Homes; Prodigies / Gifted Children, Refugees / Evacuees & Immigrants; Rascals & Scalawags; Scouts & World Youth Movements; Seafaring; Silent Cinema; Working Boys & Girls. For a full description of these 200 topics, see the [Index of Categories](#).

Each thematic document is cross-indexed by hyperlink to the relevant film entries, so that if, for example, one wanted to identify an obscure Danish children's film from the 1950s concerning a blind Eskimo boy, this title would be listed (if known to the Archive) under Arctic / Antarctica, Disabled / Handicapped, Scandinavia, and under an annotated chronological list of 1950s films. A student wishing to locate films or

documentary material on the street-children of Brazil, or the Vienna Boys' Choir, or the earliest Dickens works on film, will be able to identify the relevant titles with ease.

Individual files range from a few scant details to a document of multiple A4 pages incorporating dozens of colour and b&w stills. The file for Lindsay Anderson's "if...." (68), for example, currently stands at 20 pages, 9100 words, quoting 28 published sources, and incorporating 24 stills, alongside a thorough review from the Archive itself. 100-plus stills are held on many of the more popular titles and child actors. See the [Index of Stills](#) for a full listing.

The Asher Archive prioritises material very differently to most published film guides. Whereas these will scarcely touch upon "foreign language" titles, documentaries and short films only rarely, and silent cinema not at all, such material would be reviewed by the archive *ahead of* mainstream US commercial releases. While some of the more obvious titles *have* already been processed, information on, for example, "HOME ALONE", "THE SOUND OF MUSIC", or "THE WIZARD OF OZ" is not exactly hard to find. Obscure, small studio and independent titles are more readily ignored. The value of the archive is that it includes them all.

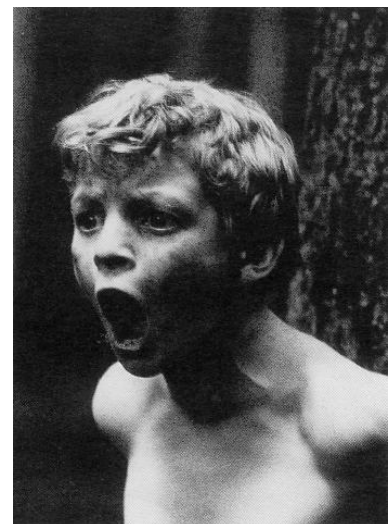
The earliest entry is "L'ARROSEUR ARROSÉ" (Fr 1895), nominally the first story film ever made, involving a boy, a gardener and a hosepipe. Early silent cinema was a rich mine of material on the antics and privations of turn-of-the-century childhood. Scandinavian cinema, with its unique affinity to children, has yielded scores of excellent

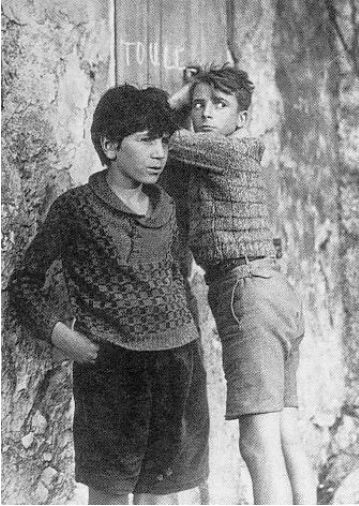
titles, most of them unknown in English-speaking countries. Czechoslovakia and the USSR, particularly in the 1970s, also had a thriving output of children's films, and even the more modest Hollywood second features of the 1930s and 40s, unseen for decades and in some cases lost, remain of interest as a snapshot of the culture of their day. In short, the Asher Archive remembers the films other guides do not reach.

Note that the Archive does *not* confine itself to children's films (those made expressly for a child audience), but has a far broader criteria. **Any and all** material which treats with childhood or adolescence, or which significantly features people under 16, will be considered relevant. All other material is excluded, especially animations.

Some classes of adult (teachers, governesses, child psychologists, scoutmasters) can fairly be regarded as a client state of childhood, so that a documentary on remedial teaching techniques would be included whether it featured children or not, and movies with a short childhood prologue are considered valid even though they are otherwise mainstream horror, gangster, or Western titles.

Few titles that *are* actually made for children ~ those by the Learning Corporation of America, for instance, or the British Children's Film & TV Foundation ~ will be found mentioned even in the more comprehensive film guides, but these would of course be prioritised by the Archive. And where children's films *are* reviewed by mainstream critics, they are rarely subjected to the same scrutiny or analysis as films for adult viewing. "OK for kids" is a





familiar cry of the TV and video guides, based on the assumption that children are an undiscerning audience for whom lower standards are acceptable. The Archive does not patronise children in this way. Children's films will be reviewed as critically as any other, and where they are rubbish, we shall not hesitate to say so.

The Asher Archive will have an immediate appeal to all fans of children in cinema, of course, and particularly those looking for a more caustic analysis than is generally to be found on the web. But any cinephile seeking more in-depth coverage of a particular commercial title, reviews of rare or obscure items, or a greater attention to world cinema, will find much to inform and entertain them.

Also, it is hoped the Archive will interest academics and social historians for its cumulative deconstruction of the politics of childhood during the twentieth century, as far as that is expressed and implied through the medium of cinema. Films do not tell us, after all, how children really **were** in the 1920s, 40s, or 90s, but how adults chose to **regard** them, or rather, how producers, directors and writers thought society **ought to** regard them. The cinema as a tool of social engineering is one of the archive's key themes

As the Archive expands and consolidates, we hope to establish links with the major international children's film festivals, conduct special interviews with past and present child stars on their own careers, and lobby television producers to show more of the wealth of "foreign language" children's material never seen on UK and US





screens. One or two web-based companies already exist specialising in a wide selection of relevant titles for sale on video and DVD, and the Archive hopes to establish reciprocal ties with the best of these.

into the **definitive** database on the cinema of childhood.

We hope you will share our conviction that this is a worthwhile goal, and lend what support you can. Any enquiries, suggestions, or offers of assistance will be most welcome. For membership details, contact:



Possessing neither the funds nor the technical skills required to maintain so huge a database online, the Asher Archive website will be simply a footprint demonstrating the existence and scope of its work, and inviting individuals to subscribe directly, whereupon they will receive all existing documents and stills in CD form. It is also hoped the website will attract the attention of people interested in active collaboration on the substantial work of the Archive, submitting and translating material from their own countries, for example.

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Many scores of websites can be found offering picture galleries of boys or girls in cinema and television, but none are attempting to collate information on films in quite the same way, and none are attempting to cover so broad a scope. The Asher Archive is a unique resource, and with greater support it can grow

