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Royal Patron Visits BFI

Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall met film stars Colin Firth and Laura Linney today during a visit to the BFI on the South Bank today.

The actors and a number of other filmmakers and participants of The Times BFI 51st London Film Festival were presented to Their Royal Highnesses as they made their first visit to the newly refurbished BFI Southbank.

During their visit the Royal party received a tour of the full range of film exhibition, screening and learning spaces at the complex. They were shown the work of artist and filmmaker Mark Lewis, whose show is currently in the Gallery at BFI Southbank, and they also met a number of young people involved in Festival education projects.

Another highlight of the tour was the new Mediatheque where Their Royal Highnesses had the chance to explore the riches of the BFI National Archive collection, with short films such as a newsreel from 1921 in which Queen Mary visits Hampstead Maternity Home and demonstrates her unique baby-handling skills, and a Coal Board film from 1954 showing eight husky miners from the West Riding Colliery perform Delibes' Coppelia, resplendent in tutus. These are just some of the 600 or more titles from the Archive that have been digitised and made available to be seen by everyone completely for free.

The Royal visit comes at a key moment in the BFI's history. As part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the DCMS has recently awarded a £25 million capital investment that will contribute towards stabilising the national collection and building a digital infrastructure to make moving image content available from archival collections across the UK.

Next year the BFI will celebrate its 75th year with a special programme of activity including the publication of an official history of the organisation. The BFI is also looking to the future with a major new landmark Film Centre planned for 2012 and is about to embark on a campaign to secure funding to begin the design process.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales has been the BFI's patron since 1979. Escorting the Royal party were Amanda Neveill, BFI Director plus other BFI Governors and staff.

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Notes to Editors

The BFI (British Film Institute) was established in 1933 to promote greater understanding, appreciation and access to film and television culture in Britain. In 1983 the BFI was incorporated by Royal Charter. It is a registered charity.

The BFI's mission is to champion moving image culture in all its richness and diversity across the UK for the benefit of as wide an audience as possible, to create and encourage debate.

The UK Film Council is the BFI's main funder using resources delegated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. To achieve its aims, every year the BFI has to more than double its grant-in-aid. It does this through raising revenue from sales of DVDs, books and cinema tickets, plus funding from donors, foundations, companies, private individuals and other funding partners.

The refurbished BFI Southbank opened in March 2007, giving visitors a greater understanding of the broad diversity of activities carried out by the BFI and allowing wider public access to the national collection of moving film image through digital technology.

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archive, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you.