



**FROM PLYMOUTH TO BOLLYWOOD -
PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY'S TIME-LOCK PRODUCTION:
'HOW DO YOU FIX A TOWN LIKE PLYMOUTH?' (2018)**

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As a member of the #ChitChat research group, from 2015 I worked on a variety of projects together with Professor Kim Stevenson, Craig Newbery-Jones and Judith Rowbotham. This collaboration had a proven track record of success, having provided a variety of innovative public engagement events and exhibitions. A regular event we contributed to was the annual ESRC Festival held in November. I was generously offered the opportunity to lead the 2018 #ChitChat ESRC Festival application by submitting a project proposal to iSPER to secure the funding.



For such public events, footfall and feedback are used as a measure to determine how well an individual event has performed. With this in mind I proposed that for the 2018 ESRC Festival we produce an independent Time-Lock documentary that could be screened at the Jill Craigie Cinema as a festival event.

The subject of the film, Chief Constable Sowerby, was based on research undertaken by Professor Kim Stevenson.²

Making a broadcast-quality 55-min documentary based on the early 1900's was certainly a challenge. Very few images exist and often those of sufficient resolution have copyright restrictions, along with prohibitive licensing costs. To compensate for

¹ Rob Giles is Director of Time-Lock Productions

² Stevenson, S., 'Chief Constables as 'moral heroes' and guardians of public morality' in Stevenson, S., Cox, D. and Channing, I., (eds), *Leading the Police: A History of Chief Constables 1835-2017* (2017, London, Routledge) pp91-108.

this, a number of dramatized scenes were planned that would require locations, costumes, props and considerable goodwill from staff and students in the School of Law, Criminology and Government, who would take on the various roles.



The ESRC festival deadline was mid-November and filming could not commence before late August. Prior to this, I was able to work on the script with Craig and Kim that would serve to structure the production. We recorded this in its entirety as voice-over, in order to create an audio sequence timeline that would provide the basis for the documentary. A library of images which could be used under the Creative Commons Licence was assembled and carefully catalogued

with references. Additional dramatization scripts were also prepared by our team historian Professor Judith Rowbotham, who referred to documented accounts of the period to provide context and authenticity. Flexibility was imperative, as the logistics of planning a shoot had multiple associated issues.

The costume supplier required specific measurements for the actors, but this was generally not possible, as they were often subject to change. There were some fittings



possible, but I was helpfully given additional size costumes to cover eventualities where roles changed and changed again. Many scenes were filmed using green-screen, which I created in the basement of 20 Portland Villas. Some additional animation and special effects were also utilised. The pressure at live costume shoots was something that I hadn't anticipated. Being responsible for sound, camera work, direction and script prompting, etc. went far beyond the short modern-day shoots of which I had experience. The

lead role of Chief Constable Sowerby was played by Mark Rothwell, who had the greater part of the script to deliver. For this role it was crucial that I could rely on his availability for various scenes. However, as a Police historian with a knowledge of

Sowerby who was very keen to be involved in the project, Mark proved to be an excellent choice for the role.

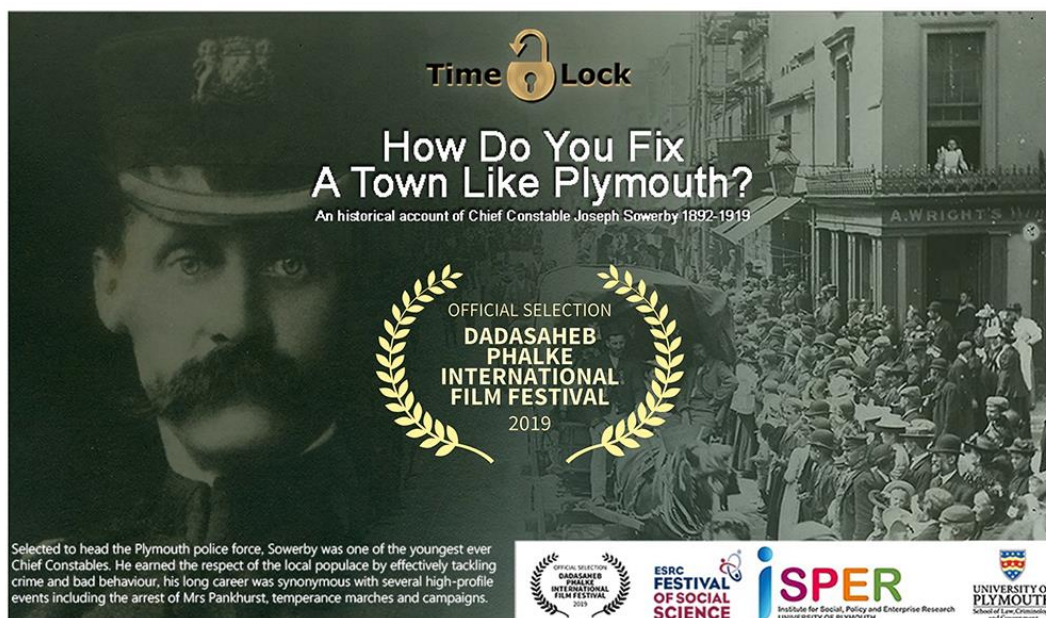
The film, 'How Do You Fix A Town like Plymouth?' was shot on locations in and around Plymouth, with Professor Stevenson presenting to camera. Interviews with Professor Rowbotham and Dr Iain Channing were also filmed for additional context.



Production took approximately eight weeks of filming and an additional four weeks editing, with the film only finally ready within 24 hours of its deadline. The film event was a true premiere, as none of the cast or production team had seen it at that time, but thankfully the cinema was full, and the event was a great success. The legacy of this production has been excellent, with two more screenings at Jill Craigie and another at Devonport Guildhall, all being very well received.



After such a positive response collected on feedback forms on the night, we decided to submit the documentary to various film festivals for consideration. To our amazement, 'How Do You Fix A Town Like Plymouth?' (Time-Lock 2018) was selected by the Dada Saheb Phalke International Film Festival in Mumbai for the Best International Documentary category. We investigated this film festival further and found it to be amongst the most prestigious film festivals in Bollywood.



For such a low budget University production this was a great honour and Professor Stevenson and I were interviewed on local BBC radio and Spotlight TV as a result. We were also generously given the opportunity to attend the gala evening in the heart of

Bollywood and plans were put in place for us both to give talks at local educational institutions whilst there.

The flight to Mumbai is over 10 hours, but a first visit to any destination that promises significant cultural diversity provides a great distraction for the journey. On our arrival the carpeted airport of Mumbai was the first indication that what we regard as standard back in the UK would need to be revised. Modern features such as travelators are all apparent, but the colours and designs are very different. The reality of contemporary travel was much in evidence however, as long queues at passport control, leading to alternative long queues at alternative passport control, seemed endless.

India was on a heightened state of alert due to the deadliest terror attack on India's state security personnel in Kashmir since 1989, with 40 fatalities and many others injured. Pakistan denied any involvement, although Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed had claimed responsibility for the attack. Our travel visas had asked us to state any connection with Pakistan, including family members or visits there, after which it took three hours to get through security, thankfully with no issues.



It was a relief to finally get out into the open air but the delay had led to our booked hotel transport being nowhere to be found. Calls to various numbers were not helping, so we chose to resolve the situation ourselves by getting a cab. These situations are

always helped by English being such a prevalent world-wide language, but as we made our way through the Mumbai traffic, we soon found ourselves far from the familiarity of England. The roads contrasted expensive shiny vehicles with others that appeared to have been involved in multiple minor incidents or that featured home-made enhancements. High rise buildings were everywhere in various states of completion and large-scale industry and commerce was very evident. As we moved further towards the Bollywood district of Juhu Beach, where we would be staying, the old city began to take over. Vehicles became even more random, beasts were tied to railings by the roadside and tuk-tuks swarmed around, looking for any slight gap in the traffic that they could wedge themselves into. There was a constant sound of horns used to

inform presence rather than annoyance, as we peered out from our air-conditioned taxi and finally swept into a hotel courtyard. A Sikh gentleman who stood at the entrance beckoned some porters to take our bags, which were placed on an ornate trolley and passed through an airport style security scanner before appearing again in the opulent lobby reception. After check-in was completed with the assurance that our bags would be waiting for us in our rooms, we headed up to assess what four-star luxury in the heart of Bollywood equates to. We weren't disappointed but sleep soon overtook us after the early morning arrival.

Waking up in the mid-afternoon it was time to explore. The hotel was situated at Juhu beach, which resembled a street market rather than a quiet holiday retreat. The stalls were filled with all manner of food being cooked, the air smelt exotic and it was agreeably warm. We walked further towards the sea to find fully clothed families walking or scattered on the sand as though on a park outing. A few were in the sea, but the reputation of the water quality gave me no desire to join them. Suddenly I was approached by a young boy with his smiling father behind. He held out his hand which I shook politely and then his father said, "thank you sir", to which I replied, "you're very welcome", wondering what had just happened.



A similar incident occurred when our party visited the Gateway to India where we posed for photographs in front of the popular tourist attraction. Groups of teenagers began to gather, politely requesting to allow them to take their photographs with us. We were happy to oblige and found

ourselves becoming the focus of a small queue that began to form. Each thanked us politely, but eventually we had to make our excuses and retreated to the famous Taj Palace Hotel, which suffered a terrorist attack in 2008



when 10 members of Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist organisation based in Pakistan, carried out 12 coordinated shooting and bombing attacks lasting four days across Mumbai. Security in the hotel was tight, with armed guards and a full body scan on arrival. Political tensions in modern India were apparent.



During our visit Professor Kim Stevenson was invited to speak to law students at the University and delivered a very topical lecture on equality for women. I was invited to speak at 'Whispering Woods' film academy, which is situated within Film City in Mumbai where many of the Bollywood blockbusters are produced. My talk, 'The Challenges of Independent Film Making' was given to the 2nd

year cohort, who filled a big screen auditorium. In preparation, I deconstructed a green screen scene which consisted of animation, animated lighting, audio effects and layered composition. I was asked many relevant questions at the end from a knowledgeable cohort of students who were extremely appreciative of the visit, which I valued greatly as a memorable international experience.

The Dada Saheb Phalke Awards 2019 were held at the Marriott Hotel Mumbai, also close to Juhu beach and our hotel in the heart of the Bollywood acting community. Many of the big stars of film and screen were rumoured to be attending; however, we



knew that none would be familiar to us. We turned up at the entrance, showed our event tickets and went into the large conference hall to take our seats. There was a notable media presence at the event, with a camera crew positioned

at various vantage points, along with the usual stage lighting and sound production team. At the front was a group of media professionals practising camera angles and just behind this were two or three rows of empty VIP seats.

As we sat taking it all in, the auditorium began to slowly fill. An elegantly dressed lady in a beautiful long pink sari swept into the room with a small entourage and tested the microphone. She began addressing the room in both Marathi and English and seemed to be the host. The event had apparently started but became slightly chaotic as the main entrance door continued to open, with attendees entering and exiting. There was a long address by the grandson of the event's patron Dada Saheb Phalke, an Indian producer, director and screenwriter, known as the 'Father of Indian Cinema' who created India's first full-length feature film 'Raja Harishchandra' in 1913. Awards were presented and every so often there would be a huge commotion as the media would rush towards the entrance, then two minutes later re-enter the auditorium in reverse scrum formation, their cameras constantly flashing towards a celebrity star who would attend briefly to collect or present an award in person. It was apparent that these Bollywood celebrities were basking in their adulation and reciprocating by adding to the prestige of the event.

At another point in the evening there was an announcement that the proceedings would take a break and reconvene in 30 minutes, whereupon a near stampede headed for the entrance. We took a few minutes to avoid the rush before heading out into the opulent foyer to find four large food serving points and a bar had been set up there. Each was crowded with guests, so as a group we stood at one of these. Almost as soon as we did we saw that it ran out of food and the crowd headed towards another that was still serving. We watched, still slightly confused about the process. Realising that to eat, we would require a plate and cutlery, we headed to another table to collect them, then queued at an empty serving point behind three or four others, gambling that food would appear at some point. The gamble paid off but we didn't bargain for the stampede that ensued. Realising that tuk-tuk rules applied, we hastily abandoned our British sense of fair-play queuing and moved quickly into any gap that appeared. This worked and soon after eating we headed back to the auditorium, wondering if our film might have been overlooked.



It seemed that the celebrity arrivals, India's hottest pop band who performed and the impromptu Bollywood dance routines, that often involved the host and anyone else on the stage at the time, had pushed some of the less exciting categories to the end. However, Kim and I were finally invited onto the stage just before the final curtain to receive a Special Achievement award. It wasn't the main award in the Best International Documentary category, but there was an acknowledgement that our low budget production had taken a rare level of dedication and professionalism to put together, and we were very grateful for this accolade.



Travelling through the streets of Mumbai by tuk-tuk gives you a real sense of the city. With no doors or windows these vehicles swerve skilfully between the traffic, avoiding a variety of obstacles along the way. The perils are real and you feel vulnerable without the safety net of highly protective western society. But you also feel alive and excited by the possibility that anything can happen in Mumbai, a city of dreams and great opportunities. Nevertheless, the contrasts it presents are stark, as multi-million-pound mansions and impressive high-rise buildings exist alongside slums and shanty towns, homelessness and extreme poverty.

Perhaps it was for this reason that our film, 'How Do You Fix A Town Like Plymouth?' struck a chord with Mumbai. When Sowerby first travelled to Plymouth he witnessed great poverty in the Barbican area, for instance. The overcrowded basic homes, the lack of sanitation, the rack renting rooms and inns facilitating gambling and prostitution, the chaos where order was desired but as yet unrealised, and the vulnerable whose situation was without hope or protection. Plymouth has come a long way since then, of course, but it is also very different from Mumbai. As India's financial, commercial and entertainment capital, Mumbai is now its wealthiest city and a melting pot of many communities and cultures, with a population of over 20 million. It was certainly a great opportunity and an unforgettable experience for us to visit this extraordinary place.