

An initial intermedial study of science on television and in museums

1945-1970

Dr Tim Boon
SCIENCE MUSEUM

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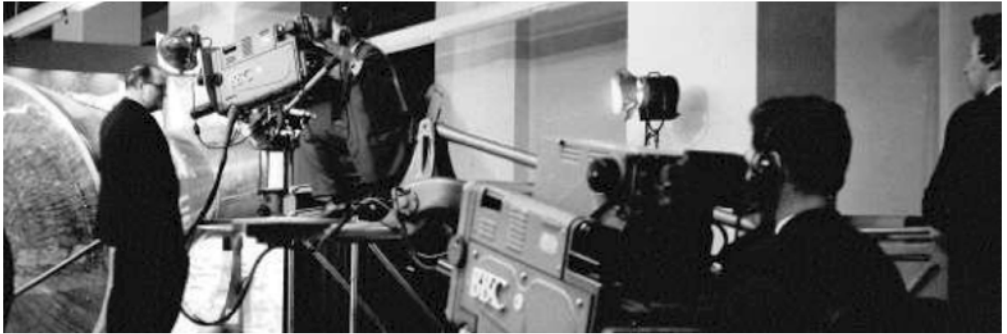
This project examined television programmes and Science Museum displays of science and technology in the 1950s and 1960s – a time when TV came to dominate public communication of science. The research found that the Science Museum played a significant part in making sciences and technology public in the period.





“ This was a speculative piece of work, with open-ended research questions. The grant allowed for research time that neither the Principal Investigator nor Co-Investigator would have been able to dedicate without the Council’s support. The grant also enabled meetings with historical participants (TV producers) and the workshop and public event. ”

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Above: The broadcaster Richard Dimpleby introduces a BBC Panorama programme from the Science Museum’s ‘Friendship 7’ exhibition in 1962.
Front: Visitors to the Science Museum’s ‘Friendship 7’ exhibition in 1962. All photos courtesy of Science Museum / SSPL.

This project was designed to provide proof of concept for the potential of drawing comparisons between television programmes and Science Museum displays of science and technology in the fifties and sixties. It was also intended to evaluate the strength of research material (paper archives at the Museum and BBC, and AV archives) to support a project of this kind, with a view to extending the scope of the research in the future.

The research was organised along four case studies that arose from first surveys of the archives: space exploration, nuclear physics, applied research in food production, and performances of the history of science. It demonstrates the relevance of the comparative approach and the strength of the material.

Overall, the project brought evidence of the richness of the history of the public presentation of science on TV and at the Museum during the fifties and sixties. Both media concurred in representing science and technology as parts of their audiences’ everyday life, and fostered a public scientific culture weaving science into the fabric of the social and cultural world. The research also testifies to the

sophistication of historical actors’ self-reflexivity, both television producers and museum curators.

A project workshop was held where producers of *Horizon* and other science documentaries in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, as well as the current editor, met historians of science and scholars in media history interested in the public communication of science. Museum curators who have also written on the Museum’s history also participated. A public event followed in which museum displays from the period were presented via an archive picture show, and a television programme from 1994, reflecting on the first thirty years of *Horizon*, was screened. Audience members then had the opportunity to ask questions of the former *Horizon* producers and/or editors present.

A paper arising from the research, authored by Dr Gouyon, is currently being refereed for the journal *History and Technology*. Two blog posts were published online, one presenting the project and the other advertising the public event and the workshop and three papers were given at academic conferences in Britain and Germany.

