

## Ephemera

### Alexander Davidson on a long-lost 1960s publicity film



<sup>\*\*</sup>  
The *Shape of Plastics* (16 mins) can be  
viewed by searching on YouTube

In 2008, Stephen Hunt and his colleagues at the British Plastics Federation found a reel of 35mm film in their stationery cupboard. It was *The Shape of Plastics*, commissioned by the BPF in 1962 and directed by Alan Pendry, who, like other noted documentary film makers, had previously worked for the prestigious Shell Film Unit.

The producer was Michael Clarke, who had worked for British Transport Films in the 1950s. During the 1960s – a high point in documentary film production – he made films for Shell, BP, ICI, Unilever, AEI and Barclay's Bank. Behind the camera was the photographer and cinematographer

Wolfgang Suschitzky, well-known for his images of London in the 1930s and 40s (on show earlier this year at the Photographers Gallery in London) and particularly for his documentary-style camerawork on Mike Hodges' 1971 film *Get Carter*.

Credited as Art Director on *The Shape of Plastics* was Geoffrey Jones, a graduate of the Central School of Art who went on to make acclaimed commercials and short films. His trademark technique, marrying images, music and rhythm, is perhaps best demonstrated in three works for British Transport Films; *Snow* (1963), *Rail* (1967) and *Locomotion* (1975).

Johnny Hawksworth, who composed this film's jazzy soundtrack, had played double bass with the Ted Heath Orchestra and was a prolific composer of TV theme tunes and incidental music. Together, the team created a film blending aloof cool with sleeves-rolled-up sincerity.

The less than ideal storage conditions have lent the film a rich magenta tone, as the cyan and yellow dyes in the acetate base destabilised. For me, this subverts some of the film's more earnest moments, its proclamations of the longevity of plastics undercut by their obvious material limitations in this case. ●