
Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

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Abstract Submission Form

- 1. Paper / Proposal Title:** 'Aardman: The Bristol Connection'
- 2. Format:** Verbal presentation
- 3. Author(s) Name:** Professor Andrew Spicer and Dr Steve Presence
- 4. Email contact details:** Andrew2.Spicer@uwe.ac.uk; Stephen2.presence@uwe.ac.uk
- 5. University or Company Affiliation:** University of the West of England

6. Abstract (300 words):

Aardman Animations is one of the UK's most successful film and television companies. Yet despite Aardman's global brand, it is also a regional company whose roots are firmly in Bristol and the south-west.

Film and television production in Bristol developed around the BBC, which has had a regional base in Bristol since 1934. Aardman moved to Bristol in 1976 to 'tag on to the apron strings of the BBC', producing short animated films for the BBC's series for deaf children, *Vision On* (1964-76). In the 1980s and 1990s, following more commissions from the BBC (*Take Hart*, 1977-83; *Hartbeat*, 1984-1993), Aardman began to develop key commercial relationships beyond Bristol. A commission from Channel 4, *Animated Conversations* (1982), resulted in the company's first major expansion and a number of commissions from the advertising industry which subsequently became the economic backbone of the company. Aardman has also developed international relationships with DreamWorks, Sony Pictures Entertainment and, most recently, with Studio Canal to produce successful series of feature films.

Alongside these major national and international relationships, Aardman has maintained an important regional presence, moving around various locations in Bristol but determined not to move away from the city. Its significant expansion has meant that Aardman has helped transform Bristol into the third largest creative hub in the UK,

after London and Manchester, and the company benefits from and helped create the large pool of freelance producers in the region. Aardman is also woven into the cultural fabric of the city, sponsoring, for example, major public arts trails featuring its characters, Gromit and Shaun the Sheep. Based on extended interviews with Aardman employees and the findings of a research project examining the media ecology of the south-west region, this paper explores Aardman's relationship with Bristol and the challenges and opportunities that have resulted from maintaining its production base in a medium-sized city.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Andrew Spicer is Professor of Cultural Production in the Centre for Moving Image Research at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. He has published widely on British cinema, masculinity, *film noir* and production cultures. His books include *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (2003), *Sydney Box* (2006), and, with A.T. McKenna, *Get Carter: Michael Klinger, Independent Production and British Cinema, 1960-1980* (2013). He has edited *European Film Noir* (2007) and co-edited *A Companion to Film Noir* (2013) and *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* (2014). He is a founder member of SiFTI (Success in the Film and Television Industries) a three-year European research partnership investigating production cultures in the film and television industries and is co-editing the summative collection *Creating Successful and Sustainable Film and Television Companies* (forthcoming: 2016).

Steve Presence is a Research Associate in the Centre for Moving Image Research at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. His research interests include political film culture, documentary, British cinema and television and Production Studies. Aside from his work on production cultures in British film and television as part of the SiFTI project, Steve is Principal Investigator on the AHRC-funded project, 'Sustaining Alternative Film Cultures', a two-year scheme run in association with the Radical Film Network (RFN), an international infrastructure for political film culture he convened in 2013. He is also co-editor of *Screenworks*, a peer-reviewed periodical in association with the *Journal of Media Practice*, and founding co-director of the Bristol Radical Film Festival.



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