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It is not often that the launch of a new historical archive attracts media attention from the BBC, *The Times*, the *Guardian*, *NME* and *Rolling Stone*, but the British Pop Archive (BPA), recently opened at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, has considerably more star power than most. Describing itself as ‘the first specifically designated, large-scale popular culture archive in the UK’, it has been established to collect papers, records and artefacts relating to the media, youth culture and the counter-culture from the Second World War to the present. A well-presented launch exhibition, overseen by curator Mat Bancroft, Library Director Professor Hannah Barker, and writer and journalist Jon Savage, showcases some eye-catching material related to the Manchester music, television and night-life scenes. Items range from Johnny Marr’s Gretsch Super Axe guitar, used to write songs for the much-loved 1980s band The Smiths, to photographs and memorabilia related to Granada TV productions such as *Brideshead Revisited*. These vibrant displays are partly designed to entice a different sort of public audience to the John Rylands Library, and any fans, in particular, of alternative music from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s will likely soon be snapping away on their phone cameras as iconic images, t-shirts, badges and magazine covers trigger pleasantly nostalgic memories. Beyond the initial excitement of the exhibition, though, the BPA team are seeking to create a nationally significant resource for research into popular culture, the entertainment industry, youth lifestyles and urban leisure in modern Britain. For scholars working in these areas, these collections have huge potential, and it is exciting to see proper resources directed to the preservation and cataloguing of materials that are still too often regarded as ephemeral.

At present, the BPA comprises eleven collections, encompassing the archives of musicians and band managers (Ian Curtis, C. P. Lee, Rob Gretton), journalists, photographers and curators (Anthony Wilson, Kevin Cummins, Jon Savage, Andy Spinoza, Bob Dickinson), and television companies and producers (Granada TV, Stephen Kelly and Judith Jones). Although the BPA’s title highlights the

musical content, the corporate archive of Granada TV, featuring some 700 boxes of material spanning the mid-1950s to 1990, is arguably the most notable holding. British television history has, inevitably and understandably, been dominated by the BBC, due to its status, longevity and popularity, as well as the depth of its archive. But there are plenty of other stories to be told, not least in terms of the ways in which independent television companies, such as Granada, related to their regional audience in different ways to the frequently London-focused BBC. This self-consciously northern identity went well beyond the classic soap opera *Coronation Street*, the magnet for most of the existing research on Granada's output, and it will be fascinating to find what the archive will reveal about the company's strategies, policies and practices, which resulted in, for example, influential news and current affairs coverage (from the pioneering reporting of the 1958 Rochdale by-election to the investigative journalism of *World in Action*), successful entertainment formats (*What the Papers Say*, *University Challenge*, *The Krypton Factor*) and high-budget dramas (*Brideshead Revisited*, *The Jewel in the Crown*). The BPA are interested in expanding this dimension of their archive: it would be a real service to academic research if different collections related to the highly fragmented independent television landscape could be brought together under one roof.

The other, more music-focused, collections will likely contribute to the growing bodies of scholarship on popular music, youth subcultures and alternative journalism. There is always a risk that material connected to the leisure and entertainment sectors, especially in areas which generate fairly obsessive fan cultures – just look at Johnny Marr's guitar! – will be regarded as trivial and frivolous. Scholars have sometimes inadvertently reinforced these views by becoming too narrowly focused in their research on these subjects, or by relying on complex theories to appear suitably academic. It would be welcome if the launch of the BPA reinforces scholarly confidence that this research is of real value. From the mid-1950s onwards, popular music has had a significant impact on the construction of social identities, on self-presentation and personal consumption, on individual value systems and attitudes to morality. Historians such as Matthew Worley, Lucy Robinson, Keith Gildart

and Patrick Glen have shown how popular music can be used to open up major issues relating to political engagement, the articulation of class and race, and the performance of gender and sexuality. Beyond the social and cultural impact, the selling of music, and associated merchandise, became a very substantial economic activity: by the mid-1990s, the sector employed some 115,000 people, and generated private consumer spending of £2.9 billion - far more than the chemical industry or shipbuilding.¹ These records can be explored through the lens of business history, and used to examine the practices of retail and advertising. Venues like Manchester's Hacienda can shed light on the dynamics of urban politics and the development of local leisure economies, not least through exploring the interaction of different social groups in the regulation of alcohol and drugs, and the surveillance of young people. Sarah Kenny's work on the Sheffield venue The Leadmill demonstrates how profitably these avenues can be pursued. Scholars, in short, should be ambitious and creative with these archives, and not let them be dismissed as marginal to the mainstream of modern British history.

These are early days for the BPA. There is much work to do organising and cataloguing the collections, and adding information to the website. It will take some time to work out quite how rich the holdings are. The attention generated by the launch has brought enquiries both from scholars and potential donors, and the BPA team are eager to build on the momentum to create a genuinely national resource. This is definitely one to watch, and it is to be hoped that funding bodies will support an archive that could transform research into British popular culture.

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¹ Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 1343.