

Brains, Virgil and Gordon in Thunderbirds ITV/REX

Since the moment Muffin the Mule trotted (with the help of human sidekick Annette Mills) onto our screens in 1946, countless stories, characters and theme songs have been broadcast for our younger family members.

Every generation has its own favourite childhood programmes. Over the years, they've taught us essential life lessons, transported us to whole new worlds and created crazes and fads – Peppa Pig has even inspired a theme park!

But despite its central cultural role, the history of children's television is not very well researched or documented.

A new project based in Coventry is out to change that. Working with organisations including the BBC, ITV and the Children's Media Foundation, The Herbert Museum and Art Gallery will gather scripts, props, footage and memories from programmes spanning nearly 70 years.

Families will be able to enjoy workshops, film screenings and events leading up to an interactive exhibition at the museum.

Here are just a few examples of some of the most memorable children's programmes of past decades:

- **1940s:** Circus horse puppet Muffin the Mule made his debut on The Children's Hour in 1946 making him a household name and the first 'star' of children's television.
- **1950s:** Blue Peter has been providing news, arts and crafts demonstrations and pets since 1958 – it is the longest running television series in the world. This decade also saw Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men first introduce

their ‘flobbadob’ language to the nation.

- **1960s:** From 1965, readers including Alan Bennett, Dame Judi Dench and Liam Neeson, brought stories to life on Jackanory – a show designed to inspire reading for children.
- **1970s:** Saturday mornings saw the likes of Chris Tarrant, Lenny Henry and Jaspar Carrott on Tiswas (Today is Saturday Watch and Smile). Flan flinging, competitions and dousing audience members with water kept the popular show on air from 1974 to 1982.
- **1980s:** Postman Pat and his cat Jess made their first delivery in Greendale in 1981. He’s still working his round over two decades later and even featured in his own film in 2014!
- **1990s:** Comedy duo Ant and Dec made their names as PJ and Duncan in Byker Grove which ran from 1989 to 2006. This decade also saw Tinky Winky, Dipsy, LaLa and Po have many bizarre adventures in the Teletubbies.
- **Today:** There is an ever increasing number of channels, characters and new ways to watch children’s television. Shows from bygone eras are also making a comeback this year – including Thunderbirds and The Clangers – proof perhaps that beloved childhood characters are never completely forgotten.




Frank Carson, Sally James, Bob Monkhouse and Gordon Astley on Tiswas ITV/Rex

## Telling the story of children’s television