

Workers Leaving the Leitz Factory (1915)

Abstract

Oskar Barnack (1879-1936), an inventor who worked as an optical engineer at the Leitz company, is mostly known for inventing the first commercially successful camera (called Leica, shortened from Leitz camera) in 1913. He also used a film camera he had built himself to capture events around Wetzlar, Hesse (where the Leitz company is still based). In addition to public events, festivals and sports, and a major flood, Barnack also shot some footage at the Leitz factory. This footage of workers leaving the factory was very likely a nod to the Lumière brothers, who had filmed workers leaving their factory in Lyon in 1895. Considered to be the first true motion picture, a film enthusiast such as Barnack would certainly have seen the Lumières' film. Here, the small exit from the Leitz factory controls access in and out for the large number of employees who pass through this gate at the end of the workday. The employees' social class and occupation can be guessed by dress, with middle class clerks and office workers in coat and tie, and workers in caps and rougher (and dirtier) clothing. Their ages range from the young to the very old. A very few are in well-worn military uniforms (and seem to limp, as if from old wounds). We see a few bicycles, and a few cigarette smokers. (Cigarettes had only been common in Germany for several decades: the shorter smoking time, compared to a cigar or a pipe, made them particularly suitable for the shorter breaks of the modern industrial workday.) Most of the workers are very aware of the camera and muster up a smile.

Source

Source: Oskar Barnack, Arbeiter verlassen das Leitzwerk, 1915. Deutsches Filminstitut Filmmuseum

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