



## **Technical Training for Film Archivists – An assessment of this pilot training event.**

As part of an initiative to address the increasing scarcity of people with film archiving skills, FIAF has run a pilot training course 'Technical Training for Film Archivists' devised by the FIAF Technical Commission. This took place in Istanbul, Turkey, in February 2015.

### **Why was it needed?**

Film archives are faced with two challenges in the area of technical skills: first of all there is a new generation of curators and managers who have grown up in an age where traditional film technology is all but absent, and where opportunities to acquire knowledge through training or on-the-job learning are scarce. Secondly, archives are confronting new technologies which are rapidly evolving to meet the needs of the commercial sector: these technologies, while offering huge potential benefits, require highly specialised skills in order for them to be adapted and exploited by film archives for their own purposes. Although there are ample training opportunities in a number of different aspects of new technology (such as in broadcast TV, or in the management and preservation of digital data in the heritage sector), the very particular needs of film archives, with their large volumes of data, extremely specialised materials, and very long timescales, require specific skills for which training is all but unavailable.

### **Who were the target group?**

The course was primarily aimed at film archive curators and managers. The supposition is that it is not possible for such people to make effective decisions and provide properly informed leadership without a solid understanding of the technology, both new and traditional, that underpins all aspects of film archive practice. In addition, the course was expected to be able to provide specialist technicians a useful grounding in technologies outside their own specialisms (though not intended to teach the elaborate skills needed to perform their jobs).

### **What was the structure of the course?**

In devising the course, we were constrained on the one hand by the availability of sufficiently expert trainers and sufficiently equipped venues, and on the other hand by the expectation that the target group would have neither the funds nor the time for a lengthy course away from their own institutions. The intention was to make the course broadly cost-

neutral for FIAF. With this in mind, the course was structured as a two-day event with maximum attendance of 20 people, hosted by a willing FIAF affiliate, in this case the Turkish Film and TV Institute in Istanbul. Our challenge was then to compress sufficient subject matter into two days of training, encompassing both lectures and practical exercises. In the event, as the result of the closure of the airports because of a heavy snowfall in Istanbul on the day most participants and the lecturers were due to travel, the course was then further compressed into one and a half days. The course timetable was as follows:

### **Day One**

09.45	Introductions
10.15	Screening (Archive promo)
10.30	History of Film Technology part 1
11.30	Break
11.45	History of Film Technology part 2
12.30	History of Magnetic Recording and TV Production
13.00	Lunch
14.00	Film Identification
14.45	Practical – Film handling and identification
15.15	Break
15.30	Digital Technology
16.00	Digitisation
16.30	Preservation of Film and Video
17.15	Tour of Film and TV Institute

### **Day Two**

09.30	Nitrate
09.45	Practical – Editing exercise
10.30	Break
10.45	Film Handling and Laboratory Work
11.15	Practical – Scanning
11.45	Digital Preservation
12.15	Preservation Strategies
12.30	Discussion
13.00	End of Course/Lunch

### **How did it go?**

Venue: More than one institution generously offered to host the course. Istanbul was chosen because accommodation is not too expensive, because of the good facilities offered by the Turkish Film and TV Institute, and because of its location – as a busy airport hub it is in relatively easy reach of Europe, Asia and Africa. In fact, the warm generosity of the hosts was beyond expectations, as they provided refreshments, lunches, dinner, as well as an extremely interesting tour of their facilities.

Take up: Initial invitations circulated internally to FIAF affiliates resulted in a poorer take up than hoped. Although there were expressions of interest, a good many institutions indicated that they were unable to fund the travel and accommodation costs at the relatively short notice (about 3 months). As the date of the course approached, invitations were extended to non-FIAF organisations and individuals. This rapidly brought the total participants up to 20; however, the snow and airport closures meant that only half of these eventually managed to get there.

Lecturers: The two lecturers were David Walsh from IWM (Imperial War Museums), London, and John Reed, formerly from the National Library of Wales.

Lectures: The highly compressed nature of the curriculum meant packing a lot of information into somewhat shortened lectures. Lectures were structured using Powerpoints mainly to illustrate the points made by the lecturers, rather than to convey detailed information. This allowed the participants to give their attention fully to the lectures without feeling the need to write down and adsorb large quantities of data.

Practical exercises: The day and a half of the course allowed only a few breaks for practical exercises and demonstrations, which were confined to a session on identifying and handling film on a Steenbeck viewer, a film editing exercise, and a demonstration of film scanning (given by the Film and TV Institute). The host institute has impressive digital capabilities, but are limited in their traditional film handling facilities (although they have a very extensive array of old equipment on display), so the practical work with film was carried out in the lecture room in a rather makeshift fashion.

Course materials: Versions of the Powerpoint slides with accompanying notes were circulated to the participants after the course.

Feedback: Participants were generally very satisfied with the course, with criticism restricted to the short length of the course and the small amount of practical work. Virtually all participants stated that they felt they needed a follow-on course to take the various topics further.

### **Lessons learned**

A longer lead time is required because of the long budget cycles of archives.

Practical work is extremely effective and popular, so ways of incorporating more practical work need to be considered.

An effectively run course of modest ambition can be cost-neutral for FIAF, but this does mean that without any subsidy many institutions cannot afford to send participants. Relying entirely on the host institution to provide facilities also limits the scope and activities to some extent.

There is demand for continuing this initiative, and it can be expected that future courses will be both viable and valuable.

David Walsh, March 2015