

REPORT FROM THE SOCIETY FOR
FILM HISTORY RESEARCH

The Society was formed at a General Meeting held on 22nd January, 1959. This meeting resulted from the publication in Sight and Sound, Winter 1957-58, of a letter by Mr Ernest Lindgren, Curator of the National Film Archive. In it he stated that an International Bureau of Film History Research had been established under the auspices of the International Federation of Film Archives and he invited persons interested in this type of research to communicate with him.

The response was encouraging and revealed a great deal of research already in progress - and also a willingness to collaborate in some form of society. Accordingly an exploratory meeting was held on November 20th, 1958, and a provisional committee was elected to examine the ways and means of forming a society. The General Meeting of January 22nd, 1959, examined the committee's proposals and brought the Society into being.

While Britain has a few film historians whose work is well known, we also have many individuals pursuing research work in private. From letters received it is clear that this research would be strengthened by the encouragement that a Society could offer, especially by offering an outlet through its publications for findings which at present remain unknown for want of a suitable medium.

It is encouraging to find that many research workers are primarily interested in aspects of British film history; there is an acute awareness that time is obliterating the traces of British film pioneers. The survivors are old people now and their first cinemas and studios are being destroyed. With the changing situation of the film industry, even recent events become rapidly obscured. Many research workers are alive to the need for a number of "rescue digs", to use an archaeological term, and they know that some sort of co-ordination will make for efficiency.

Some offer help in translation, cataloguing, identification of players production companies, etc.; others are interested in international projects, with contributions from specialists in many countries.

The Society for Film History Research is needed to promote these ideals and encourage research into particular aspects of film history which have been little investigated. This is a new function and complements the specialised work of such groups as the two federations of film societies and the British Kinematograph Society, and the more general activities of the British Film Institute, which at present rather more provides material for research than directly promoting research itself.

In accordance with its objects the Society will be publishing a journal Cinema Studies, free to members, and contributions are invited from members.

Two meetings have already been held this year. At the first, one of the members showed two films from his collection: MICHAEL STROGOFF, directed by Viatcheslav Tourjansky (1926) and THE SPANISH DANCER, directed by Herbert Brenon (1923). The second took the form of a visit to the Kodak Museum Cine Section, where the

Curator and Research Librarian, Dr R.S. Schultze, introduced the exhibits and gave a film show, including shots of images produced by early optical toys, and films made by Demeney in 1896.

Two Newsletters have been prepared and circulated to members and interested persons.

So far, we have 26 subscribing members, which is considerably encouraging in view of the fact that the Society has not yet completed its first year, nor has published its journal. Our policy is to hasten slowly. We are more interested in people doing work and do not wish to build a big society of names.

All aspects of the film press - trade and cultural - have expressed interest in the Society and mentioned its formation as an item of interest for their readers. Several members heard of the Society through these media and subsequently joined.

We are anxious to arrange an exchange of copies of publications. The Editor of Cinema Studies will be delighted to receive copies for review of any publications, which members of the Bureau consider worthy to be drawn to the attention of members.

John Minchinton
Chairman,
Society for Film History Research