

NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE OF AUSTRALIA
REPORT 1984

Introduction

In 1984 the National Film Archive became the National Film and Sound Archive, and was separated from the National Library of Australia, with which it had been associated from its beginnings in 1935. This momentous event, the outcome of a process referred to in last year's report, took place in April. Subsequently, the Archive gained its own building and hence its own physical identity, and has begun to implement a revised administrative structure appropriate to its new status.

Creation of the National Film and Sound Archive

Widely-based public and industry pressure supporting complete autonomy for the Archive, had mounted during 1983 to the extent where the issue was widely aired in the media, with the Prime Minister making a public statement in September 1983 to the effect that the Archive's future and level of autonomy were being reviewed, and that increased resources would be made available to it. The Archive's status continued to be the focus of public and professional debate which had philosophical as well as practical aspects. Ultimately, the separation of the Archive from the National Library was announced by the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, Hon. Barry Cohen, on 5 April 1984. (Copy of statement - Appendix A). As well as the provision of increased funding and staffing, and a mandate for the Archive's activities, the Minister announced the setting up of two Government Committees with specific tasks in relation to the planning of the Archive's future.

Reaction to the creation of the new body was immediate and for those who had urged the Government to act, very positive. Understandably, however, the parting of the ways was neither simple nor devoid of emotion.

It is apparent that the NFSA is an institution whose time has come and its creation is the natural outcome of a process of growth that has been going on for many years. In the Australian context, the setting up of NFSA is, in effect, an important symbolic act which recognises the stature and uniqueness of the 20th century media in this country. It is also, of course, a vital step in the task of gaining adequate resources for the Archive's work.

Status of NFSA

The Archive was created initially as an autonomous office within the Department of Home Affairs and Environment (subsequently re-named the Department of Arts, Heritage and Environment). Its longer term status, including any legislative basis will be considered by the Government following the reports presented by the two Committees it has established.

Committees

The NFSA Advisory Committee a group of 12 people widely representative of the industries and communities with which the Archive deals, has a wide ranging brief to develop plans for the future growth of the NFSA (Appendix C). It will report back to Government in September 1985 on the future development strategy for NFSA. Its work has included a call for public submissions and it is expected that its report should be available to FIAF members.

The Interdepartmental Committee on the Commonwealth's Film and Sound Collections comprises representatives of government authorities whose responsibilities include activities relevant to NFSA's functions. The purpose of the committee is to consider, following the creation of NFSA, ways in which existing activities can be better co-ordinated and rationalised.

Interstate Offices

In setting up NFSA the Government also decided that it would set up offices in the main population centres, Sydney and Melbourne in addition to its Canberra headquarters. The Melbourne office, in a central city location, opened on 4 October 1984.

Opening of NFSA Headquarters

The Government also directed that NFSA should move from its accommodation in the National Library building as soon as possible. Accordingly, NFSA was given possession of the former Australian Institute of Anatomy building set in parkland close to the centre of Canberra. One of Canberra's oldest (1929) public buildings and a famous architectural gem in its own right, it contains many features - such as a theatre, a library and exhibition galleries, as well as office and storage space - which are readily usable by NFSA. Refurbishment of the building was commenced, with stage 1 being completed in October.

On 3 October 1984, the Prime Minister, Hon. R.J.L. Hawke AC MP, officially opened the building as NFSA's headquarters at a spectacular ceremony attended by over 1000 people, including some of Australia's best known film and television personalities, politicians and other prominent guests. The Prime Minister's speech (Appendix B) set out something of the government's vision for the NFSA and forms an important reference point for its future. The event received national media coverage, including a half hour television special edited from highlights of the occasion.

Following the official opening, an initial exhibition was thereafter on show for visitors, with a larger exhibition on costume design for film, "Dressed to Thrill", opening in December 1984.

By the end of the year, administrative staff and some film and sound staff had occupied the new building, with remaining staff and collections awaiting transfer following complete refurbishment of the building.

ACQUISITION

Over 3500 titles were acquired, a 15% increase on 1983. In volume terms, this amounted to a total of 8519 cans of film (818 acetate, 338 nitrate) and 1416 reels of videotape. Some of the main highlights included:

Films

SCROOGE (first Australian produced telemovie - made in 1957)
BACKROADS
STATIONS
FRONTLINE
PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE
THE DEEP
1941
THE BLUE LAGOON
PAPILLON
MURDER BY DEATH
THE CHINA SYNDROME

A large collection of films made by students of the Swinburne Institute of Technology was also acquired.

Video

The Video Industry Distributors Association announced that its members would deposit copies of their video cassette releases with NFSA for viewing purposes.

Television

CATWALK
RIPTIDE
COPSHOP
ALL THE RIVERS RUN (mini-series)
A COUNTRY PRACTICE
SHIRL'S NEIGHBOURHOOD
MIKE WALSH SHOW
60 MINUTES
FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE (mini-series)

The Last Film Search

The drive to rescue Australia's rapidly disappearing holdings of nitrate film continued, in spite of organisational changes and the need to concentrate publicity activities elsewhere. Nonetheless, the search achieved a large number of significant "finds" including:

- an excerpt from an unidentified silent Ned Kelly film
- the opening of the Prahran-Malvern tramway in Melbourne
- the film of Albert Namatjira
- footage of the 1926 Melbourne cup
- CAN'T BE SNOOKERED, featuring Walter Lindrum, the world champion snooker player.
- footage of a chiropractic manipulative therapy clinic in northern Queensland, during the 1930's.

In 1985, efforts will be intensified to recover the substantial holdings of film still in private hands and deteriorating. A plan for this is being formulated, and with greater organisational stability and an increased publicity campaign, it should see the Search adding substantially to the considerable achievements of its first three years.

CATALOGUING/USAGE/DOCUMENTATION

Cataloguing

1984 marked the introduction of the Film Location and Information Control System (FLICS), a computer system designed to control the receipt, accessioning and movement of the NFSA's film and television collection, provide user access to title, production and subject data and provide a management information reporting facility. The system has replaced most of the NFSA's manual record systems and has provided substantial improvements in efficiency. Currently, FLICS holds data for approximately 4500 titles. The NFSA is looking at ways in which to complete the task of converting manual records for the remaining 45,000 titles. When this is achieved, FLICS will be a very powerful collection management tool.

Access

Despite the continuance of access restrictions, demand for access to the NFSA's collections has risen dramatically. The total number of inquiries received was 2788. This is not directly comparable with last year's figures as it includes telephone inquiries as well as inquiries by letter and in person. Undoubtedly, this is due to the increased public profile of the NFSA. Some of the major projects serviced in 1983 include:

Feature Films

NO NAMES, NO PACKDRILL = REBEL
THE COCA COLA KID (produced by Sylvie le Clezio)
BLISS (produced by Anthony Buckley)

Documentaries

PALACE OF DREAMS (produced by Anthony Buckley)
RIVER JOURNEYS (a BBC/ABC television production)
WORLD WAR 1 (produced by Film Australia)
OK TEDI

TV Series

TOP END SAGA (documentary series on the Northern Territory)
THE LAST BASTION (mini-series)
THE DUNERA BOYS (mini-series)
A FORTUNATE LIFE
1000 SKIES

46,000 feet of film (56 prints) and 89 videotapes were made for clients.

Documentation

Acquisitions were 719 stills and lobby cards, 452 posters and press sheets, and 325 scripts. Use of the documentation collection increased dramatically; there were 568 usage inquiries, compared to 148 in 1983. Some of the major acquisitions included:

- a set of rare postcards featuring stills from THE STORY OF THE KELLY GANG (1906)
- photographs taken during the filming of FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE (1927)
- original sheet music for ADORABLE OUTCAST (1929)
- 24 sheet original posters for CLARA GIBBINGS (1934)
- a collection of scripts of background research spanning 20 years work by leading scriptwriter Tony Morphett.

Some of the major usage projects included:

- The STILLS ALIVE exhibition mounted by photographer Joyce Agee
- The Encyclopaedia of Australian Film by John Stewart
- exhibitions for the NFSA opening

Preservation

Preservation work showed an improvement on the previous year. During 1984:

- 106,000 feet of nitrate was copied onto acetate for preservation. This resulted in 326,000 feet of acetate material, including viewing and duping copies.
- In total, from all categories of material:
 - . 170,000 feet (245 items) of preservation copies were made.
 - . 236,000 feet (466 items) of viewing copies were made.
 - . 174,000 feet (306 items) of duping copies were made.
 - . 2322 minutes (72 items) of videotape were made.
- 492 cans of film were retrieved for depositors.

Computer Applications

During 1984, the Film Location and Information Control System (FLICS) was implemented. The basic objectives of the system are to control the receipt, accessioning and movement of all film and videotape items in the NFSA's collections. So far, almost 5,000 title records have been entered into FLICS and already the benefits of having on-line access to a vast range of information on each title are being appreciated.

Screenings

With the separation from the National Library (which has retained the distribution library of the National Film Lending collection together with the film screening program in which the Archive was previously involved) the NFSA has decided to address other priorities before establishing its own screening activities.

However, it is directed by the Government to establish a screening program and plans to do so in 1985. Meanwhile, it has participated in discussions with the Australian Film Commission, Australian Film Institute and other bodies in connection with the review of non-commercial exhibition activities in Australia: discussions which should result in a better ordered network of outlets for (among other things) seasons of films from NFSA.

Special Projects

The Archive has entered into an agreement with the Australian Bicentennial Authority to undertake a feasibility study for a national Travelling Film Retrospective, one of the major activities of Australia's Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988.

The study commenced towards the end of the year, with funds provided by the Authority. Former curator of the National Film Archive, Mike Lynskey, who rejoined NFSA's staff during the year, has undertaken the study on a full time basis. It is due for completion mid-1985.

Meanwhile, the Archive's reconstructed version of the 1927 film FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE continued commercial screenings successfully throughout Australia during the year.

Budget

NFSA's total budget for 1984/85 is approximately A\$2.6 million. This is a considerable increase on the previous year - about 100% or more (a precise comparison is impossible due to the difficulties of comparing NFSA's first "autonomous" budget with the relevant components of the National Library's budget in the previous year) although as an autonomous body NFSA now has a much wider range of activities of service. A larger proportion of the year's budget will be spent on the acquisition of equipment than has previously been possible. This will include the establishment of a basic professional video capability.

Staffing

The government's decision to establish NFSA included an increase of 15 in the staffing level, assuming that established positions belonging to NFSA's predecessors in the National Library would be transferred to the new body. Negotiations with the Library were complicated by the fact that for some years many Library staff had been on "loan" to the Archive and were not formally part of its staff establishment. In the end, NFSA's staffing cover was set at 44 person-years, a net gain of about 6 on its previous real staffing capacity.

In May 1984, Colin Pitson was appointed Interim Director of the new body, with Ray Edmondson as acting head of its Film and Television branch. By the end of the year, they filled the positions of Acting Director and Acting Deputy Director respectively. Henning Schou was appointed Acting Head of Film and Television Preservation, and (in December) Ann Baylis was appointed Acting Head of Film and Television Collection Services.

During the latter part of the year, an initial structure for the NFSA was developed and many positions advertised, including all senior positions.

Overseas Visits

Dr Henning Schou's internationally recognised expertise in film preservation resulted in his being called upon to attend many overseas gatherings during 1984. He chaired two meetings of the FIAF Preservation Commission, and was invited to Vienna to participate in a Unesco expert group discussing a 5 year plan for film preservation in hot and humid countries. Prior to that Dr Schou had been a faculty member of the Unesco Seminar for Developing Archives held in Poona, India. He also visited the film archive in Bangkok, Thailand to advise on film preservation.

Whilst on extended leave David Watson visited film archives in France, East Germany, West Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom to study their operations with particular interest in computer applications in film archiving.

Conclusion

1984 has been a momentous year of intense activity, much of it devoted to the essential work of setting up a new, autonomous organisation. NFSA looks forward to 1985 as its first full year of operation in its new form.