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NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE

Report 1981

Introduction

In 1981 the Australian film industry's output matched, for the first time, the boom years of 1911-12: 36 features were in production in 1981 (42 were released in 1911 and 30 in 1912). It is a sad fact of film survival that only two reels of one production survive from 1911, and not a single frame from 1912. The launch of THE LAST FILM SEARCH in October (see later in this report) was timely for an industry increasingly aware of its identity, its history and the relevance of preservation; it has raised the logical question "Will another LAST FILM SEARCH be needed in 30 years' time?" and has turned attention toward the adequacy of resources and means for preservation in Australia for contemporary films and television.

The year has been a very difficult one. Resources have been more or less static - a fact of life for most government instrumentalities - and the problems, needs and backlogs identified in last year's AFC Working Party Report on the National Film Archive in the National Library of Australia have compounded a growing crisis. Perhaps paradoxically, acquisition and demand for access services rose to record levels.

Acquisitions

In last year's report the acquisition of Australia's largest private film collection - the Harry Davidson collection - was noted. A listing of this collection is now available, upon request, to FIAF members.

The highlight of the year was the acquisition of 20,000 television news items dating from 1958 (two years after television began in Australia) to the late 1960's. The collection is a complete coverage of news items for this period and is currently being spliced together and listed.

A large collection of original material and viewing prints for productions dating from 1970 to 1981 for a major production body, the South Australian Film Corporation, was also obtained.

More than 11,000 other films and videotapes were acquired during the year, including the following Australian titles:

DAWN
STONE
EXITS
YUMI YEI
ILERSEN
THE MAN FROM HONG KONG

JOURNEY OUT OF DARKNESS
WEEKEND OF SHADOWS

and overseas titles:

DCG DAY AFTERNOON
CIMMERON PASS
SHE
METEORCLIS
CH MR PORTER
MAMEA
ASTRO DUCK: A STAR IS BORED:
HEER TODAY GONE TOMALE
and other Warner cartoons
A selection of Republic B-westerns

Television material dominated this years intake, comprising over 60% of acquisitions.

Major items and series acquired include:

WHIPLASH
SIMON TOWNSEND'S WONDER WORLD
THE MAVIS BRAMSTON SHOW
ARTHUR AND THE SQUARE KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE
THE NORMAN GUNSTON SHOW
THE AUSTRALIANS
AGAINST THE WIND
THE LAST OUTLAW
THE MAGIC CIRCLE CLUB/THE MARVELLOUS MUNCHKIN SHOW

A significant development during 1981 was a more active and systematic approach to the acquisition of documentation material. Close and productive relationships were developed with the Greater Union Organisation, the government film funding organisations, Roadshow Distributors, Warner Bros. and Fox/Columbia.. Emphasis is placed upon Australian material but a constant flow of publicity material for foreign films is also acquired. Awareness of the stills collection was strengthened with the publication of a set of high quality gift cards from the Archive's holdings of Australian stills.

Preservation

The position of Preservation Officer was vacant until May, which seriously affected the preservation program. Servicing the rising access demand dominated the available staff capacity and although the total throughput for the year reached a record of over 150,000 metres, most of this represented the production of viewing copies for exhibition commitments, special projects like the FOR THE TERM ... restoration, and routine access requests. Less than 5,000 metres of nitrate film were transferred to acetate.

Problems were experienced in making the new nitrate vault fully operational: there were recurrent mechanical problems which may necessitate re-design of some components.

There was a perceptible growth in general and film industry interest in preservation matters, perhaps engendered by publicity concerning nitrate loss and the problems of colour fading.

Tests were conducted to determine improved methods of printing shrunken and scratched film on facilities currently available in Australia. Wet gate equipment for such material is not yet accessible.

USAGE

Demands from filmmakers and television networks continued to accelerate during 1981. The Archive found it increasingly difficult to balance the demands of usage against those of preservation/acquisition.

Some of the more significant of the 1,500 major projects and enquiries with which the Archive was associated were:

- . Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals
- . Australian bicentennial history project
- . Survey of surviving advertising films
- . Documentary on Australian migrants
- . History of Melbourne
- . Aboriginal films
- . Various television current affairs programs
- . History of slavery in Australia
- . European settlement in Papua New Guinea
- . Impact of World War 2 on Papua New Guinea
- . History of mining in Australia
- . History of the telephone in Australia
- . Support to the Australian Film and Television School
- . Film on dam building
- . Aviation in Papua New Guinea
- . Australian/American foreign relations
- . Legends on the screen film season

In May, a Viewing Centre for the Archive was opened in Melbourne (operated in conjunction with the State Film Centre) where viewing prints may be used on a flat bed viewer under appropriately secure conditions. The Centre is experimental in nature: a prototype of a scheme which could eventually embrace all of Australia's major population centres, and a possible way of overcoming some of the formidable access problems posed by Australia's geography. The Centre has registered rapidly increasing popularity throughout its operation so far.

STAFF

Reclassification of staff positions became operational early in the year. The 'librarianship' qualification, formerly a prerequisite for most positions, is no longer mandatory.

Dr Henning Schou was appointed in May to take charge of the Archive's preservation activities. Mike Lynskey was appointed Curator in December. He had been Acting Curator for an extended period.

BUDGET AND FUNDING

The government provided preservation/acquisition budget for fiscal 1981/82 is \$149,000, a rise of 5.7% on the previous year. This growth was more than offset by rises in laboratory costs, film stock and videotape of up to 25%. As Australia's main consumer of black and white film stock the Archive is dependent of the goodwill of three laboratories still maintaining black and white plants. Fortunately the largest, Colcrfilm Laboratories, is a strong supporter of the Archive and has made substantial concessions in its charges.

Funds raised externally to support projects such as THE LAST FILM SEARCH and the restoration of FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE, totalled about \$200,000. This included substantial commitments by the Australian Film Commission, Kodak (Australasia) Pty. Ltd., the Utah Foundation and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs.

CATALOGUING

The critical shortage of staff caused work on the sophisticated Archive data base to be halted at its present level of about 200 titles (the total collection now exceeds 50,000 titles). The lack of a catalogue of the collection is now a very serious problem. Alternative sources of funding for this activity are being investigated.

COMMITTEE

During the year the Advisory Committee on the National Film Archive was established, meeting for the first time in December. Its membership includes key executives and creative people from the Australian film and television industry, and it has a broad brief to advise the National Library Council on policy and other matters affecting the Archive, to facilitate contact with the industry and encourage support for the Archive. Members serve in an honorary capacity.

While its establishment results from a specific recommendation in the Working Party Report, it also fills a long felt need.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

- * Restoration of the 1927 silent epic FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE was completed in June. It opened the 1981 Sydney Film Festival - the first silent film ever to do so - and has since played in other festivals in Australia and overseas.

TERM is the most elaborate restoration yet attempted by the NFA: the project included the re-introduction of tints and tones and the compilation and performance of an orchestral accompaniment. A substantial investment by the Australian Film Commission - a government funding authority - offset the considerable costs. The film attracted an extraordinary amount of publicity and has done much to focus public attention and goodwill on the Archive. TERM will be commercially released in 1982.

- * The CINEMA AUSTRALIA 1896-1956 retrospective continued its schedule of engagements in Europe. A parallel season was launched in North America at the San Francisco Film Festival in October.
- * The LAST FILM SEARCH was launched in October. This 5-year project is an effort to gather in to the Archive the remaining nitrate film in Australia. A consortium of commercial sponsors - whose sole return from the project is measurable only in terms of "public relations" - have committed over \$100,000, most of which will be spent to cover costs of publicity materials, and the contract employment and expenses of a travelling field officer who is literally searching the country for old film.

The SEARCH is largely reliant for its success on voluntary public cooperation, and on free media publicity to convey its message. Its success on both scores has been astonishing: the SEARCH has proved to have an enduring romantic appeal to the media which has given it, in its first 4 months, national coverage which even the most generous advertising budget could never have bought. Hundreds of reels of film have already been located: but large scale results will not be apparent until 1982.

FILM SCREENINGS, EXHIBITIONS, PUBLICATIONS

FILM SCREENINGS

Weekly public screenings continued on the established pattern.

The seasons included: HOW WE LAUGHED: AMERICAN COMEDY FROM THE 40's TO THE 70's including TO BE OR NOT TO BE, NO TIME FOR SERGEANTS, THE GREAT RACE, WHAT'S UP DOC.

AT THE MOVIES IN 1942 - including DAD RUDD MP, FORTY THOUSAND HORSEMEN, HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY, WESTERN UNION

THE AUSTRALIAN CHARACTER AS SEEN BY OVERSEAS DIRECTORS - including BITTER SPRINGS, ROBBERY UNDER ARMS, SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL, THE SUNDOWNERS, THEY'RE A WEIRD MOB.

DANA ANDREWS - including, LAURA, BOOMERANG, DAISY KENYON, STRANGE LADY IN TOWN.

EXHIBITIONS/PUBLICATIONS

"100 AUSTRALIAN FILM POSTERS": mounted and exhibited in each capital city in Australia through the assistance of the Myer Department Store chain. An exhibition of material relating to the reconstructed film FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE was prepared and exhibited in Sydney and in Canberra.

A set of 12 gift cards based on Australian film stills was produced by a commercial publisher.

A major book by John Tulloch - Legends on the Screen: the Australia Narrative Cinema 1919-1929, AFI/Currency Press, Sydney 1981, was published. It drew almost entirely upon the resources of the Archive.

Various Australian cinema journals, trade magazines and the press published articles on Australian film history and the National Film Archive.

VISITS AND VISITORS

Clyde Jeavons, of the National Film Archive, London and Nicole Schmitt of the Centre National de la Cinematographie, Bois d'Arcy, visited in June and November respectively. Both visits were of sufficient duration to allow wide consultation with staff and discussions on practices and activities. The visits were historic - the first in over a decade by Senior staff of other FIAF archives.

Ray Edmondson, director of the National Library's Film Section (of which the National Film Archive is a part) attended the Rapallo congress and went on to visit colleagues at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, West Berlin; Staatliches Filmarchiv, East Berlin; and National Film Archive, London.