

REPORT 1983

1. INTRODUCTION

In retrospect 1983 has been a very important year in the development of the National Film Archive. As the year progressed, its budgetary and administrative needs became the centre of considerable public and parliamentary attention at the highest level, including an undertaking by the Prime Minister - broadcast on national television - that the Archive would be given increased resources and greater autonomy. The precise manner in which this undertaking was to be given effect was still unknown as the year closed, though a government announcement was expected early in the new year.

The level of film industry and public awareness of the Archive also rose considerably during the year, with the success of THE LAST FILM SEARCH and lobbying by supportive industry and cultural groups being contributing factors.

Film production in Australia has risen to a strong level - this year 20 features were entered in the Australian Film Institute Awards. This is despite changes to tax legislation which have reduced benefits to film investors. There was a concern about the quality of films being released and to this end the Australian Film Commission has been granted an additional \$5 million to invest in films of "cultural merit with a good chance of commercial success".

Funding and staffing levels in the Archive remained inadequate - the permanent staff remained at 9 plus one part-time fixed-term. The temporary 'task force' staff count remained at 16. The budget has been increased to \$315,000 for the 1983/4 financial year, but this is still far from adequate.

2. ACQUISITION

Over 3,000 titles were acquired, a 50% increase on 1982. In volume terms, this amounted to a total of 7791 cans of film (6725 acetate, 1066 nitrate) and 235 reels of videotape.

A brief selection of titles:

Features

CENTRESPREAD	THE GOODBYE GIRL
NEWSFRONT	PRIVATE BENJAMIN
THE LONG WEEKEND	BODY HEAT
SUMMER CITY	WRONG SIDE OF THE ROAD
CHAIN REACTION	BACKROADS
SQUEAKER'S MATE	BARNEY
KAMPUCHEA AFTER POL POT	

SOUTHERN CROSSING (JAZZ CONCERT)
THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ

Two large collections of independent film makers films from the Australian Film Institute and the Sydney Film makers Co-operative.

Video

Rock clips by Chris Lofven and Chris Worrall.

Mushroom Records rock clips.

Television

THE LAST OUTLAW (mini series)

STAX (Children's TV series)

Large collection of 16mm. black & white television news inserts.

The Last Film Search

This project, begun in 1981, is a major effort to recover Australia's vanishing holdings of nitrate film before it is too late. The project is funded by a number of commercial and government sponsors and its success - both in publicity terms and in the quantities of film acquired has exceeded all expectations. It would be no idle boast to say that most Australians have now heard of the project in some form.

During the year the initial "active search" phase, involving a travelling field officer who completed an epic trek with car and caravan to every state of Australia, reached its appointed end. However, the 3 part-time Canberra-based staff continued to operate and pursue the recovery of film and the follow-up of leads.

Major 'finds' of the search include:

A print of KING OF KINGS (Cecil B de Mille)
IN NEW GUINEA WILDS (1926 feature shot around coastal areas of New Guinea)

New Guinea footage of the Sepik and Eastern highlands from the 40's to the 50's

Vintage commercials for BERLEI foundation garments

THE WOMAN SUFFERS (Raymond Longford's classic feature from 1918)

Lumiere footage of Sydney, Brisbane and Queensland from 1899

It is clear, from the experience of the last 2 years, that the SEARCH needs to be escalated considerably to recover the estimated film holdings still in private hands and now rapidly disintegrating, and a strategy for this is being developed. Meanwhile, sorting, listing and preservation work on the recovered film has commenced.

3. PRESERVATION

Nitrate coping 94,000 feet was copied, involving 89 titles, and resulting in 167,250 of acetate preservation copies. While higher than the throughput of recent years, this figure falls far short of the estimated 600,000 feet per year necessary from this point if all of the Archive's nitrate is to be copied by the year 2000. Considerable increase in staff and funds will be needed to achieve this goal. Some uncopied material was lost through decomposition.

Other Copying 330,000 feet (266 titles) of duping copies, 392,000 feet (424 titles) of viewing copies and 54 hours (140 titles) of duping and viewing videotapes were made during the year. The imbalance compared to the nitrate figure reflects not only the lower cost per unit of material in this category, but the fact that it is much less demanding in terms of limited staff time. It also reflects the pressing need to create materials in these categories, since at present an estimated 85% of all titles in the Archive are held only in the form of preservation copies.

Client work 58,000 feet of film and 13 hours of videotape were printed and supplied to client order, and 554 cans of film were returned (either temporarily or permanently) to depositors.

Accessioning 6745 cans of film were accessioned (ie. numbered, listed, labelled and otherwise recorded), with some inroads into the Archive's huge unsorted backlog being made. This included the task of recanning, examining and renumbering the nitrate collection, which was completed during the year.

In total, accessioning activity occupied 8.2 man years and other preservation activity 3.8 man years, including the "task force" and volunteer staff.

4. CATALOGUING/USAGE/DOCUMENTATION

Cataloguing Only a few hundred of the Archive's 50,000 titles are catalogued, and staff resources have never been available to make any inroads into this backlog. However, a computer system (titled FLICS - Film Location and Information Control System) has been under development, with scheduled implementation in March 1984. The main aims of the system are to control the receipt, accessioning and movement of the Archive's film and videotape collection, to provide user access to title, production and subject data and to provide a management information reporting facility. The system will replace most of the Archive's existing manual record systems and provide a considerable improvement in efficiency. Concurrent with the system's introduction, the members of the National Library's task force allocated to the Archive will undertake the input of the existing manual records into the new system, together with the accessioning of the Archive's huge backlog. It is estimated that this major task will be completed in early 1986.

Access Access restrictions, introduced in June 1982 as a result of overload in the face of increasing demand, have remained in force. This has disadvantaged a number of compilation documentaries and has resulted in a decline of enquiries from 1873 last year to 1307 this year. Nonetheless a number of important standing commitments were serviced, and 1983 has seen the release of films that have been using the Archive's resources for some years. These are:

FOR LOVE OF MONEY (90 min. Documentary on Women in the Australian Workforce, by Flashback films)

LOUSY LITTLE SIXPENCE (60 min. Documentary on Aborigines and labour in NSW and the beginnings of Aboriginal rights movement)

ALLIES (90 min. Documentary by Sylvie le Clezio and Alan Frankovich on the CIA in Australia)

Other projects serviced this year include:

Feature films

PHAR LAP (Michael Edgely/John Sexton feature - film used in research)
SILVER CITY (produced by Joan Long)
CAMEL BOY (Yoram Gross animated feature)
STRIKE BOUND (Low budget feature by Miranda Bain & Timothy White)
ONE NIGHT STAND (Richard Mason/John Duigan)
SIMPSON (Will Sterling feature)

Documentaries

SURF MOVIES (Albie Thoms TV documentary)
THE WILD ONE (Albie Thoms TV documentary)
FIRST CONTACT (Bob Connelly & Robyn Anderson documentary on New Guinea)
AUSTRALIAN MOVIES TO THE WORLD (2 hour Tv history of the Australian film industry)
COMING UP FROM DOWN UNDER (90 minute story of the Australian film industry for the US market - Leonard Films)
THE CATTLE KING (Bill Bennett documentary on Sidney Kidman)

TV Series

NAKED UNDER CAPRICORN (David Waddington)
THE ITALIANS (ABC series)
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (ABC Education programme)
MATHS IN AUSTRALIA (documentary, Mantis Wildlife Films for BBC)
AIR RACE FILM (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting/Film Victoria co-production on 1934 Air Race London-Melbourne)

Monographs

Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, "Australian Cinema - The first eighty years". Angus & Robertson, 1983.

Documentation : Acquisitions were 1121 stills and lobby cards, 612 posters and press sheets, and 571 scripts. There were 148 usage enquiries. Assistance from the "task force" enabled considerable progress to be made in sorting and organising backlogged material, especially scripts and posters, making them accessible. Unfortunately, the development of the documentation collections is limited by available staff time (only one full time officer) and both acquisition coverage and access services are therefore very limited.

5. SCREENINGS

During the year the Archive contributed to the public film screening programs of the National Library, and made available material for festive screenings in Australia and Overseas. The CINEMA AUSTRALIA 1896-1956 retrospective continued to screen in European locations and its reconstructed version of FOR THE TERM OF HIS NATURAL LIFE was presented at Cannes.

6. BUDGET/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Archive is funded through the National Library's annual budget voted by Parliament. The cost of staff salaries and operational overheads is absorbed within the National Library's budget for these requirements.

The preservation/acquisition budget for 1983/4 is \$315,000, an increase of \$65,000 (or 26%) on the previous year. Unfortunately this increase does little more than keep pace with relentless increases in costs. This amount does not include donations or sponsor support for THE LAST FILM SEARCH and other projects.

7. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Dr. Henning Schou, Head of Preservation, and Chairman of FIAF Preservation Commission attended the FIAF Congress and Preservation Commission meeting in 1983. He also visited Archives in West Germany and Great Britain and attended 'BKSTS' '83'.

Mike Lynskey, Curator of the Archive, visited film archives in China, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia in January 1983.

Gillian Hartnoll from the British Film Institute made a brief visit in January to inspect the Archive, and to discuss the National Library's automation facilities.

As part of the Cultural Exchange Agreement, the Deputy Curator from the China National Film Archive, Mr Yi Ming, and Mrs Wu Meixian visited Australia for 3 weeks in June. They visited many organisations and spent over a week at the Archive.

8. MISCELLANEOUS

Staff Curator, Mike Lynskey, left the Archive in September to take up the post of Cultural Affairs Officer at the Australian Film Commission in Sydney. Head of acquisition, David Watson, replaced him on an acting basis. A permanent appointment will be made in 1984.

Advisory Committee on the National Film Archive

This Committee, which is an advisory body to the National Library Council on policy, liaison and operational matters affecting the Archive, was set up in December 1981. It comprises prominent members of the film and television industry and culture, and met 3 times during the year.

During its two years of existence the committee has provided strong support and encouragement to the Archive. It has greatly increased the Archive's prominence and liaison with the industry, and has facilitated the wide discussion and appreciation of fundamental development issues facing the Archive. It has provided an authoritative source of advice for the National Library Council.

Public Focus

During the latter half of the year (especially) the future development of the Archive became a matter of widespread concern and attention not only with the film, television and library communities but also in the national media and in Parliament. Central issues were the need for substantial increases in funds and resources, the question of autonomy and the

Archive's future relationship to the National Library and (to a lesser extent) the Archive's geographic location. On 24 September, during the national Australian Film Institute Awards telecast, the Prime Minister announced increased support and a change of status for the Archive, though no specific details were given. It is expected that the specifics of the Archive's future will be dealt with in Cabinet early in 1984. Throughout this period a great many interested organisations and individuals made public statements on the issues and lobbied appropriate members of Parliament. The widespread concern and support for the Archive thereby demonstrated has been both remarkable and very encouraging.