

INTRODUCTION

During 1977 film and television production in Australia has continued at a strong level and there has been a growth in the cultural importance of film and its popularity as an object of serious study, with expanding film study courses in universities and schools. Largely as a result, use of the archive for research, and as a source of footage and screening prints, increased markedly during the year.

ACQUISITION

Intake was slightly lower than last year's record level, but was still very heavy, totalling approximately 2,700 titles.

Among feature films acquired were:

COUNTRY TOWN (Australia)
DEMONSTRATOR (Australia)
KING OF THE CORAL SEA (Australia)
THE DAMNED (U.S.A.)
REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE (U.S.A.)
THE MUSIC MAN (U.S.A.)
STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (U.S.A.)
PETULIA (U.S.A.)
CIGANYOK (Hungary)
WHITE HAired GIRL (China)

Film maker John Heyer deposited original negatives of THE BACK OF BEYOND, THE FORERUNNER and other documentary and experimental films made by him in the 1940's and 1950's. Other important deposits of original or duping materials came from the Australian Inland Mission (including MANTLE OF SAFETY, a feature documentary on the Australian outback in the 1940's) and

the Australian Conference Association (footage on missionary work in the Pacific Islands in the 1930's, with an ethnographic emphasis).

Other retrospective acquisitions included much documentary and newsreel material from Australian producers of the 1920's and 1930's - located largely as a result of staff field trips. Perhaps the most important feature acquisition was an incomplete print of ROBBERY UNDER ARMS (1920), located by colleague Graham Shirley during a visit to New Zealand. This film will be the subject of a future restoration project: some footage already held will be combined with this copy to produce a complete version.

A collection of over 100 early American, British and European one-reelers was also acquired - nitrate prints which had once been part of the stock-in-trade of an itinerant troupe of entertainers before World War I.

Television acquisitions were at a record level, and included Australian series such as MY NAME'S MCGOOLEY, WHAT'S YOURS?, YOU CAN'T SEE ROUND CORNERS, THIS IS YOUR LIFE, THE MIKE WALSH SHOW, and THE SULLIVANS. In some cases complete series were acquired: in others, a selection of sample episodes. The material ranged from current programming to items from the earliest years of Australian television. It was possible to begin development of a coordinated means of surveying Australian production as a basis for selecting TV material for preservation - a difficult task in view of geographical considerations and the quantity of local programming produced in every Australian state. The year saw the completion of a series of personal visits by archive staff to every capital-city commercial TV station in Australia, to set up operating contacts as a prelude to developing an effective selection/acquisition policy.

Documentation acquisitions totalled about 8,000 stills, 1,000 posters and 500 slides, as well as hundreds of scripts and other items. Once again our colleagues at the Danish Film Museum contributed substantially to this total, with the remainder of material coming from distributors, producers and collectors. An item of special interest - donated by a private collector - was an original poster for THE STORY OF THE KELLY GANG (1906) - the first feature film made in Australia and possibly, on available evidence, the world. This find received wide media coverage.

FINANCE

Preservation and acquisition budget for 1977/78 is \$85,000 - a slight reduction on the 1976/77 figure, with strong government spending restraints still in evidence. Salaries, administrative expenses and equipment costs are additional to this and are met separately by the Library.

PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

Work was again concentrated on the transferring of nitrate film to acetate -

a total this year, of 60,000 feet.

Pressure of user services continued to restrict staff time available for preservation work.

The continued decline in the capacity of Australian laboratories to handle black and white processing was a matter of some concern: the year saw some major rationalisation of processing capabilities, and one large laboratory discontinuing black and white work altogether. While the continuity of copying work has not been affected, costs have risen once again and in the long term the necessity for the archive to establish its own processing facility seems inevitable.

A major project completed during the year was the restoration of the 1921 Australian feature *SILKS AND SADDLES*. Considerable technical and editorial restoration was necessary to produce new prints from the original negative; the film was successfully premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in June. As the year closed, similar restoration work on *THE BREAKING OF THE DROUGHT* (1920) was nearing completion.

GENERAL

Staff ceilings continued in operation during the year, putting the established staff of 5 under very heavy pressure as usage of the collections reached an all time high. In addition, the position of documentation officer was vacant for several months which caused backlogs of work in the area.

It was, however, possible to tackle some accumulated backlogs through the augmenting of archive staff by an additional team of 5 people on loan from elsewhere in the National Library. Beginning in January, the team sorted through, checked and accessioned some 3,000 issues of *Cinesound Review* and *Movietone News* newsreels acquired in the course of the newsreel copying project (1973-1977), and subsequently have begun sorting and filing work on 70,000 unsorted stills.

It was possible to resume, in March, regular programmes of public screenings (suspended during 1976 for economy reasons). The most notable of the seasons arranged during the year was a two-month tribute to Warner Bros., selected from Warner material now in the collection and officially opened by the managing director of Warner Bros. (Australia), Mr Noel Ford.

Towards the end of the year, a major Australian retrospective season for national touring by the National Film Theatre of Australia was being compiled - the centre piece being the newly restored feature *THE BREAKING OF THE DROUGHT* (1920).

Service demands rose during the year to an average of 40 per month, a level which indicates the increased importance of the archive within the Australian

film community, and there was also a growth in the use of on-site viewing facilities and requests from outside bodies for the loan of viewing prints. A number of major film and television projects were thereby assisted during the year, including a 13-hour TV series on 'Australia in the Twentieth Century' which will consist largely of footage drawn from the collection.

The availability of storage and work space has been a problem, arising from sustained growth in the collections during a period of government spending restraints. Improved accommodation for preservation copies was arranged, both within the National Library building and in external facilities; arrangements for the building of low-temperature nitrate vaults reached finality and tenders were called, with construction due to start in 1978. However the development of larger scale preservation storage facilities for videotape and acetate film remains a larger, and now more imminent, problem.

The series of 'state of the art' meetings - involving the National Library, the Australian Film Commission, Australian Archives and the Australian Film and Television School - reached a conclusion, resulting in the preparation of a report on film archive operations and needs which will be presented to the appropriate government Minister. The work of the original series of meetings has been continued since June by a standards sub-committee, which is examining ways of coordinating color coding and nomenclature in the film and TV industry in a way that will facilitate the transfer of original negatives and masters, without loss or confusion, to an archival situation after initial release.

The year brought a significant policy decision from the Australian Film Commission under which the makers of all short films receiving financial assistance from the Commission will be required to deposit their original negatives in the archive after their film's release. Australia has no legal deposit legislation for films and this move by the Commission - which is the major avenue through which government funds are channelled into the encouragement of film production - is an important precedent. It is hoped it can be later extended to include feature films funded by the Commission.

Field trips made by staff - to Tasmania, Queensland, N.S.W. and Victoria - received considerable publicity and resulted in important acquisitions, particularly of nitrate material. It has become obvious that these trips fill an important public relations function in maintaining a level of community awareness that encourages unsolicited donations of material and unsought 'finds', and are some compensation for the problems of geographic distance in Australia.

The National Library's European liaison officer, Ivan Page, attended the 1977 Congress at Varna.