

Oral History Interviews with Karen Jones and Michael Moulds

Eileen Bowser & Christian Dimitriu

EDITORIAL NOTE | NOTE ÉDITORIALE | NOTA EDITORIAL

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Periodicals Indexing Project – commonly known as the P.I.P. – a major FIAF initiative that originated in the late 1960s and came into being in the early 1970s. The present set of two interviews, both conducted in 2011, aims to document the first steps in its history and development, and includes the memories of two key figures: Karen Jones, interviewed by Eileen Bowser, and Michael Moulds, interviewed by Christian Dimitriu. The interviews are complemented by a P.I.P. Timeline, compiled by the Project’s current Editor Rutger Penne and Associate Editor Anthony Blampied.

Cette année marque le 40^{ème} anniversaire de la création du Periodicals Indexing Project – plus connu comme P.I.P. – une importante initiative de la FIAF qui a vu le jour à la fin des années 60 et s’est concrétisée au début des années 70. Cet ensemble d’entretiens, tous deux menés en 2011, se propose de documenter les débuts du projet et son développement et inclut les souvenirs de deux personnalités : Karen Jones, interviewée par Eileen Bowser, et Michael Moulds, interviewé par Christian Dimitriu. Les entretiens sont enrichis d’une chronologie du P.I.P., établie par Rutger Penne, l’actuel éditeur du projet, et Anthony Blampied, l’éditeur associé.

Este año marca el 40 aniversario de la creación del Periodicals Indexing Project – comúnmente conocido como P.I.P. – una importante iniciativa de la FIAF nacida a finales de los 60 y que empezó a finales de los 70. Las dos entrevistas, ambas realizadas en 2011, se proponen documentar los primeros pasos de su historia y desarrollo, e incluyen los recuerdos de dos personas claves: Karen Jones, entrevistada por Eileen Bowser, y Michael Moulds, entrevistado por Christian Dimitriu. Las entrevistas se complementan con una cronología del P.I.P., compilada por el actual editor del proyecto Rutger Penne y el editor asociado Anthony Blampied.

Michael Moulds and the P.I.P.

Christian Dimitriu

Christian Dimitriu is an independent film archive consultant, and a Correspondent of the *Journal of Film Preservation*.

Interviewer's Note: My conversation with Michael Moulds took place in Lyon on 5 November 2011, within the framework of the FIAF Oral History Project. The logical continuation of the interview of Karen Jones done by Eileen Bowser in early 2011, it contains additional references for the study of one of FIAF's major cooperative projects. A subsidiary interest of Michael's memories is that they illustrate the work of a craftsman and innovator whose work generously contributed to the fulfillment of the policies and projects defined by the Executive Committee of that period.

When I arrived at the FIAF Secretariat in Brussels in 1995 the P.I.P. was based in London. The merger of the two organizations represented financial savings and centralized administration, and responded to the necessity of integrating its activities, requiring the adoption of ever-evolving new technologies. One of my first major tasks was to work with Michael to integrate the P.I.P. into the structure of the Brussels office. It was a pleasure to recall our numerous meetings in London and Brussels in 1996 and to share this phase of the development of the P.I.P. in Lyon 15 years later.

Michael, if you wish, let's start with your personal background. What souvenirs from your childhood, your teens, your first interests and work, would you like to bring up at this point?

Well, I was born in Harrogate, Yorkshire, and educated at Prince Henry's Grammar School, Otley. My main interest was in sport. I was a good cricketer, and captain of rugby. I got my school certificate at the age of 16, which was normal, and I expected to stay on for the higher certificate. I read James Joyce and Shakespeare, loved music and poetry... However, a teacher approached me in a corri-

dor one day and said that a bank in Ilkley was looking for somebody to start work as an assistant. I thought this would be something I could tell my parents that would make them laugh... Instead it was the beginning of my working life and the end of my formal education.

At the age of 18, I was conscripted into the [Royal] Air Force. They sent me to Egypt, where I spent 2 years and 3 months, and where I performed office work, played rugby and cricket, read Homer on guard duty, and swam in the Great Bitter Lake.

What influence did your experience in Egypt have?

I said to myself I would take all the exams I could get while in the Air Force, and when I was free I would go to university. When I came out, the first thing I did was apply for university, but they said, "You have worked already, therefore you are not allowed to register..." So, I didn't go to university, but I did spend a few months hitch-hiking in France with my then-girlfriend, and resisted the invitation to return to the bank. My interest in literature led me to a job at the Harrogate Public Library. After a few years there I decided it was time I moved to London. I wanted to work with film, and applied for the position of stock-shot librarian at the Shell Film Unit. I didn't get that job at first, but I did land a job at the Kensington Reference Library, and after a few months working in Kensington, I passed an interview and finally got the Shell job. These were my first experiences of living in London and working with film.

How long had you been interested in cinema?

I had always been very much interested in watching movies. The Academy Cinema in Oxford Street was the place to see all the great films of the time, the French New Wave, the Japanese, and the new British Films. Naturally I wanted to be a director, but after a year or two when this didn't happen, I got a job as Information Officer of the Scientific Film Association. While I was there, I started listing all non-fiction films made in the UK, and resulting from that I became involved with the production of the first issue of the *British National Film Catalogue*, which resulted in my editing it for the first 6 years of its life. After 6

years as Editor I had made all the innovations I could and was getting restless when, one day, attending an international meeting in London, I was approached by a man who turned out to be Peter Morris, the curator of the Canadian Film Archive. He asked me if I would be interested in creating a filmography of Canadian films. I decided that I had done enough of that sort of work, but I saw that they were starting a new Film Studies department, and instead became Head of Film Studies. Then when Peter went on a year's sabbatical I took his place and became Acting Curator. In fact, his year became almost two. I really enjoyed running the archive, and when Peter came back I felt it wasn't really possible for me to go back to my former position, so I started looking around for something else to do.

It's in Ottawa where your involvement in the Commission started?

Not immediately. I was already involved in different projects. I was particularly engaged in creating a new classification scheme for film literature while I was in Ottawa. That eventually became the *FIAF Classification Scheme for Film & Television Literature*.

Did you have relations with the BFI at that time? Did the BFI support or subsidize the Commission work?

...Not really. The BFI had already developed their own indexing systems.

When did you start your work for FIAF? Were you involved in other discussions besides the Commission work?

I first became aware of the International Federation of Film Archives during my first year in Canada, and I attended my first Commission meeting in Budapest in 1970. I don't think I was involved in other discussions.

When you came back from Canada, did you have contacts with FIAF personalities, with FIAF officers?

I had no particular contact with FIAF members, except those who were on the Documentation Commission. We were documentarians, and were not usually in contact with FIAF officers. So, I met Karen Jones and the other members of the Commission, Brenda Davies, Milka Staykova, Eileen Bowser,

John Luijckx... I had got to know them all at the meetings of the P.I.P., while I was still in Canada. They were a tremendous group of people, who worked hard but also had fun. The friendships forged at that time have lasted to this day. The atmosphere of the Commission meetings changed later. Several Europeans resigned and were replaced by new American members. This changed the character of the Commission.

You took over as Editor in 1973. What did it mean to you to direct such a wide-reaching project as the P.I.P. in so many countries? Were you aware, at that time, of the importance of the Project?

Yes I was very aware of its importance. The Project originated with Karen, and I worked on it with her in the early days. Karen was coming to the end of the first year's work on the P.I.P., which she had carried out at the Danish Film Archive. It was decided that the Project should be moved to London. I returned to London in November 1972 without work and gladly took over from her as Editor in 1973.

Retrospectively, the early 1970s, and in particular 1973, seem to be a very dynamic period in FIAF's history. The FIAF Newsletter became the FIAF Bulletin, the predecessor of the JFP, the first FIAF Summer School took place in East Berlin, and the P.I.P. was quickly developing. From what I know, at the same time you went through a particularly difficult period...

We had just bought a house in Islington that needed total renovation. As there was no budget for an office I offered a room in the house, hastily decorated – by me. The work of Editor was set up as a "half-time" job, and I thought I would be able to work on the house the rest of the time. The editing was to be done in London, with the cards travelling back and forth to Brussels: very complex working procedures. Karen may have seen it as a half-time job because she had had the facilities and personnel of the Danish Film Museum at her disposal. I was without any such assistance. I found myself being paid for a half-time job while doing a full-time job. It seems to me now that all my difficulties came from that initial confusion. This was of course never Karen's intention. We had not thought it through clearly at all.

I suppose it was difficult for the EC to set up something, not knowing how it would evolve...

Well, late in 1973, after a year of desperation, I expressed my feelings about the situation, that I was not prepared to continue as things were. And two weeks later I received a letter of dismissal from Jacques Ledoux. I suppose there were contradictory attitudes in the EC, and maybe Jacques was not the person making [the] decisions, but he was the person who wrote to me.

Anyway, as a result Karen came to London and the work started on a different footing, with assistants, equipment, an office in Shaftesbury Avenue, access to BFI facilities just around the corner... She worked there for a year and then went back to Denmark, and Frances Thorpe took over and worked for 5 or so years. Then she was offered a post at the BFI, and the position became vacant once more.

Did you work during those years?

During those 6 years, I did lots of other work. It was pretty tough at the time, but looking back I see it as a great opportunity. I created book indexes, including a number of volumes in Time-Life's "Good Cook" series. I took an Arts Council course in Theatre Administration, and I did some administration for the Tricycle theatre company in West London, which I enjoyed, but decided it was not for me. I had already developed a real interest in photography, and that was when it became the centre of my life. I did theatre production stills, portraits of actors, and so on; also architectural photographs for a London university. My pictures were published in a few periodicals and I began to exhibit in London. I had bought my first Leica in the late 60s, and I still work with a Leica. I also still only work in black and white – colour to me is for "snaps" – and I have never gone digital.

When you resumed the position of Editor of the P.I.P. in 1981, what were the next steps in the development of the project?

After all these years my memory of this part of my life is a little hazy, but I see from my annual reports and the reports of the Documentation Committee meetings just how much innovation I pushed through during my time as Editor. You must understand that dur-

ing the previous 11 years only minor details had changed, though Television indexing had been mooted in 1979.

In 1982, after one year acclimatizing myself, I started to introduce new methods. For instance, the P.I.P. was still sending out the indexing on cards. This was a costly and bulky operation, and it was clear it could be done more efficiently and cheaply with a more (at that time) advanced technology – on microfiches. This was implemented in 1983, and by 1984 most of the problems of the first year had been ironed out and the number of entries considerably increased. We also produced cumulations going back 12 years, as well as continuing to publish the annual volume. I started writing more intensively and often to the subscribers.

Was there any recognition of the work the P.I.P. was doing?

Well, in June 1982 the BFI made a special award to the P.I.P., which Karen and I received at the National Film Theatre on behalf of the Commission. The citation mentioned it as "a great work of scholarship ... a fundamental tool of immeasurable importance to scholars and librarians...."

But we never had enough indexers, and around this time we set up workshops for indexers to encourage them and help them to learn how to help us. Karen, Frances, and I taught at the workshop in London, and I conducted the ones in Ottawa and Berlin. These were very useful to everyone involved, and very enjoyable too. But experienced indexers left archives and new staff arrived who were ignorant of our needs, and we ended up indexing many foreign periodicals ourselves, never the purpose of the P.I.P. We were losing indexers every year. I continually throughout my time went on appealing to heads of archives and setting up indexer workshops.

Setting up this sort of thing was in addition to your main job as Editor?

Well, yes. And I was constantly looking for ways to increase the efficiency of the operation and keep down costs, constantly looking for funding, to change the way of printing both microfiches and annual volumes. In 1983 we received funding from the Independent TV companies to continue publishing the TV volume.



Michael Moulds during his interview in Lyon, November 2011

How hard was it to find staff to assist in this very specialized work?

Very hard. But at Shaftesbury Avenue I had two dedicated and highly intelligent assistants, each part-time, Marie Nguyen and Giovanna Ceroni. I had to teach them what the job entailed, but both of them learned fast and did it brilliantly.

As well as funding, indexing, and finding good staff, what were your other problems?

I remember 1986 as a crunch year. We had been sharing the Shaftesbury Avenue office with Infodoc and using their computer. Their lease and ours were coming to an end, so this arrangement couldn't continue. I proposed putting the P.I.P. on an independent basis by having our own computer to produce our services. It seems extraordinary now that the idea of having our own computer should have to be justified at all, even in the mid-80s, but I met a lot of opposition and had to go to immense trouble to prove my case that this would in the end cut our costs and make us much more efficient. I knew that it had to happen if the P.I.P. was to continue. At one meeting around this time David Francis said I was "full of creative ideas"

that I could not implement without constantly going to outside sources for funds. He was right there! I was spending too much energy on just keeping the project solvent. It was frustrating, because in all respects except the financial the P.I.P. was very successful, but we needed an annual subsidy of £5,000-£6,000 to survive. Anyway, I started looking for a new office.

London rents being so high, this would have meant moving outside the West End?

Indeed. In 1987 after an exhaustive search we moved to Canalot Studios in North Kensington, a former chocolate factory recently converted to offices housing various "media" organizations. FIAF made us a loan to buy the computer, and we bought an Amstrad with a 20-MB hard disc. After intensive research I chose Computaprint to make the camera-ready copy for the volumes, and the microfiches would be smaller and hold much more data, considerably cutting our costs. We increased the number of subscribers but not of indexers, so [we] planned more indexer workshops for 1989....

Did your assistants move with you?

No. Marie went back to Paris to work at the Bibliothèque Nationale and Giovanna moved on to an editorial job. I had a desperate time finding a new assistant, among all the problems to be ironed out between our – now – self-generated copy and the microfiche bureau. But in 1988 (I think it was) Ron Magliozzi joined the Documentation Commission, a welcome addition. And best of all, Anthony Blampied came to work for us. It was a great relief to have a reliable and intelligent, hard-working, and amusing assistant.

We already needed a new computer, and in 1990 we got an Elonex 386SX with a 100-MB disc. Around this time Brigitte van der Elst started to be very helpful to the P.I.P. She was always very committed to the Project. And to me. I remember her with great affection. The report on the meeting in Athens refers to the fact that the change to our own computer was a “total success” thanks to my “dedication and solitary struggles”!

I know a new project at this time was the revised edition of the Michael Moulds *FIAF Classification Scheme for Film & Television Literature*.

Yes. Karen and I had discussed problems and possible alterations and we worked together on the revised edition at all the DC meetings. It looked as though it might at last be published, but [then] Karen resigned from the Documentation Commission. Though we went on working together and though our friendship survives unchanged, she was a sad loss to the Commission – as were Milka Staykova and John Luijckx – and the revised edition was not published until 1992. And I was also now compiling the *FIAF List of Subject Headings for Film & Television Literature*.

What would you say was your most significant contribution to the P.I.P.?

Oh, the *Classification Scheme for Film Literature*, which I started originally to create in Canada in 1970.

And of course the fact that in 1991 I introduced the idea of the CD-ROM to supersede the microfiches, bringing the P.I.P. into the computer age. If I had not made those changes it could easily have gone under. I was convinced

this was the way to go – at last a CD that could hold 600 MB of data – and I started discussions with the Open University with a view to their producing our CD-ROM. And at last in 1993 we produced and circulated the first CD-ROM.

Excitement soon became general about this new technology – almost unheard of when I first suggested it. There was a much bigger potential market for it than for the microfiches. But any new technology generates its own problems – again we had to buy a new computer, with 220 MB, and I see we even acquired a (second-hand) FAX machine. Then, as rents, rates, and parking charges had gone up, we had to move offices again, this time to Marylebone.

The P.I.P. project always was and still is definitely a complicated business. It relies on the work done by people paid by their own institutions. The only person who in the past worked a lot on the project, but was not properly remunerated, was the Editor. This has fortunately changed during the last 15 years.

Well, I would hope so. I think when I finally gave up in October 1997 I was earning around £25,000, not exactly a fortune.

The fact that for a certain number of years the Project became a flourishing business resulted in a change in the concept, as well as in the business plans worked out by Rutger Penne at a later stage.

Yes, for several years the finances were in good shape. In spite of paying back loans to FIAF, we had been more than breaking even. I see from my report for 1993 a profit of over £900.... And there had never been such interest in our work. We had many more subscribers, in spite of never having enough publicity. The 1996 volume was the biggest it had ever been. However, ironically, the CD-ROM quickly became the normal technology, so that we couldn't compete in the modern market and had to charge less than we had for the microfiches even though our service was immeasurably better.

It was a strange predicament to be in after all those years of struggle to keep the project afloat. I had really had enough, but I wanted to leave the project in good hands. I asked Anthony if he wanted to take over as Editor,

but no, he did not want that responsibility. I believed that Rutger was the right person for the job, and I invited him to attend the CD-ROM editorial board meeting in Brussels in 1997 in order that he might get a notion of what we were about.

Do you believe there will be a big change in documentation activities in the future? Heads of archives often believe that technological changes will solve lots of problems, but the quality and accuracy of the information gathered will remain an important component of our work.

It is unlikely that there would be great changes in the nature of the work. The gathering of information will remain the same, even if the technological and methodological issues change. Also, the P.I.P. is based on the enthusiasm of the people that work for it and, from the other side, depends on the quality of the indexers, who must be very well acquainted with the subject they are dealing with.

How did you find the Brussels experience? We had a common project of moving to Paris, and discussed it over and over. But the odds were against us.

Ah yes, we wanted to move to Paris, and Anthony was keen too. We even found an office and a good working arrangement with some colleagues of yours. However, I think the decision to move the project to Brussels was the right one. The home of FIAF, after all. Brigitte was welcoming and generous with her time and support. As were you.

Finally, tell us a little something about your life now.

We sold our apartment in London 3 years ago, and now live permanently in Forcalquier, in southern France. Forcalquier is a pretty special place. We'd known it for 30-odd years before we bought the house, and it suits us well. Forcalquier has a cinema; we couldn't live there otherwise. It's housed in an 18th-century church; when we first lived there it was just like "Cinema Paradiso". We see films often before their release in London; we refuse to watch any movie that has been revoiced in any language, but go to watch subtitled movies at least once a week. It's recently been digitized, and that makes me a bit sad. I sometimes feel

I'd like to go back to London, sometimes still dream of a place in Paris, but my dark-room is in Forcalquier and it would be hell's own job to dismantle it and move it again. So I'm not really considering moving back. But you never know...

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Réalisée dans le cadre du projet « Histoire orale de la FIAF », l'entrevue de Christian Dimitriu avec Michael Moulds – publiée ici dans une version abrégée – constitue le pendant à l'entrevue de Karen Jones en ce même numéro. Les deux témoignages éclairent un moment historique de l'histoire de la FIAF : la création du Periodicals Indexing Project (P.I.P.).

Bien connu pour son livre *FIAF Classification Scheme for Literature on Film and Television* de 1992, Michael Moulds débute sa collaboration avec la FIAF dès 1970 alors que, à l'invitation de Peter Morris, il travaille au Canadian Film Archive d'Ottawa et qu'il se rend à sa première réunion de la Commission de Documentation, à Budapest. De retour à Londres en 1972, il assume la responsabilité du P.I.P. récemment créé, fonction qu'il abandonnera à Karen Jones l'année suivante, pour la reprendre officiellement en 1981. Commence alors une période de travail intense et novateur (microfiches, puis bases de données) qui définira le profil actuel du P.I.P.

Michael Moulds accompagnera le P.I.P. au moment de son déménagement à Bruxelles en 1996 après quoi il rentrera à Londres retrouver son « home » et sa chère Leica. Michael Moulds et son épouse, l'actrice et écrivain Maureen O'Brien, vivent désormais en France, à Forcalquier, et c'est à Lyon que Christian Dimitriu a recueilli les souvenirs de Michael.

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Realizado en el marco del proyecto « Historia oral de la FIAF », la entrevista de Christian Dimitriu con Michael Moulds – publicada en una versión abreviada en paralelo con la entrevista de Karen Jones en este mismo número – completa simultáneamente los momentos importantes de la historia de la FIAF: la creación del Periodicals Indexing Project (P.I.P.).

Conocido por su libro *FIAF Classification Scheme for Literature on Film and Television* de 1992, Michael Moulds comienza su colaboración con la FIAF a partir de 1970 mientras que trabajaba, invitado por Peter Morris, para el Canadian Film Archive de Ottawa. Es entonces que participa por primera vez en una reunión de la Comisión de documentación de la FIAF, en Budapest. A su regreso a Londres, en 1972, asume la dirección del P.I.P., proyecto que estaba en su fase inicial, responsabilidad que cederá a Karen Jones el año siguiente, para retomarlo oficialmente en 1981. Comienza entonces un período de trabajo intenso e innovador que prefigurarán el perfil actual del P.I.P. (primero con el manejo de las micro-fichas, luego la gestión de bases de datos electrónicas y la generalización del uso del CD ROM para su difusión).

Michael Moulds acompañará al P.I.P. en su mudanza de Londres a Bruselas en 1996, y el año siguiente regresará a su hogar en Londres para juntarse con su familia y su querida Leica. Michael Moulds y su esposa, la actriz y escritora Maureen O'Brien viven actualmente en Francia, en Forcalquier, y es en Lyon que Christian Dimitriu fue a recoger los recuerdos de Michael.