FIAF Summer School 1996

Report by Clyde Jeavons, Consultant Curator, NFTVA/BFI

The National Film and Television Archive, London (NFTVA), hosted and organised its second FIAF Summer School at the J Paul Getty Conservation Centre, Berkhamsted, Herts, from 16 June to 7 July, 1996, after a four-year interval.

Once again, the objective was to provide an intensive training and awareness course for film archivists from around the world having some experience of film handling and archival practices (*see attached circular of November 1995*). As is customary, the emphasis was on the preservation of moving images and related technical processes, but (learning one of the lessons from 1992) significantly more time was allotted on this occasion to topics such as the history, philosophy and ethics of film archiving, and acquisition, cataloguing, access and programming. One successful element of the latter was a highly imaginative, dramatised, interactive workshop (*'Archival Ethics in Action...' - see attached paper*), devised by the NFTVA's Sarah Davy and Linda Kaye, which overcame shyness and language barriers to involve all the participants in the daily dilemmas of a besieged archivist at work.

Thirty-six participants undertook the course, an increase (provoked by heavy demand) of four over the previous Summer School. This proved an absolute maximum for both the Conservation Centre capacity and that of 'Old Jordans', the popular guest house used as accommodation during the School, with three-to-a-room being necessary in one or two cases to squeeze everyone in. On reflection, even with the most expansive and comfortable facilities to hand, this is rather too many people to attempt to teach, accommodate and deploy over such a concentrated period. We have no regrets at having drawn so many participants (more nice and interesting people to meet and get to know!), but would really advise against it: 25 or so (plus one's own staff as co-ordinators) is a comfortable number to aim for. [*A complete portrait list of participants is attached.*]

However, one of the key aims of the Summer School is to attract participants from the poorer and technically deprived FIAF archives and those with geographical, climatic or economic problems, subsidising them as necessary. In this respect, the '96 event was outstandingly successful: the global spread of attendees embraced Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Israel, Singapore, Burkina Faso, Finland, Taiwan, Romania, Latvia, USA, Vietnam, Ireland, Macedonia, Albania, Australia, Sri Lanka, India, France, Netherlands, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Thailand, Greece, and of course the UK (including Wales) - a high proportion of practitioners for whom the facilities and techniques of one of the better-endowed archives was, frankly, a revelation, but also recognised as something to aspire to. One innovation - again successful, adding a useful new dimension and fresh views to the course - was a collaboration with the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT), whose President (Ted Johanssen) and Secretary-General (Steve Bryant) agreed to donate £3,000 to the Summer School's expenses in return for a quota of FIAT places on the Course. These were taken by Ulrica Edholm (Sveriges Television, Stockholm), Stefan Machedon (Romanian Television), Natash Vasi (Albanian Television) and Despina Zervou (Greek Television), all of whom qualified by having responsibility for significant holdings of film in their television collections. [*See Despina's report on the Summer School written for the FIAT*

NewsLetter of September 1996 - attached.]

FIAT's cash contribution was one of several welcome and very necessary sponsorship or budgetary contributions to the '96 Summer School which enabled it (quite remarkably) to break even on overall costs. As well as the FIAT contribution, there were grants of (in approximate round figures in pounds sterling) £11,300 from UNESCO; £12,700 from FIAF; £10,000 from the European Union's RAPHAEL Training Fund; and £500 from Soho Images. The balance came in kind and overheads from the NFTVA/BFI. These considerable donations helped to subsidise a number of participants who would not otherwise have been able to afford the course and accommodation fees of £1,000 ($1,500), and all the above contributors deserve warm thanks, as well as the British Council (for helping once again with some local air fares) and the LUMIERE Project for co-operating crucially on the RAPHAEL application. [*A full budget breakdown can be obtained by request to CJ.*]

The training course itself was not significantly different from the one devised for the1992 Summer School (*for the full range of Lecture subjects and Papers, see lists attached*), but its focuses, emphases and priorities were critically influenced by the experience and feedback of the earlier School. As well as more attention being paid to the wider scope of archive activities mentioned above, there was, on the technical side, far more hands-on teaching and less lecturing (although the latter cannot be eliminated entirely when the divergence of knowledge among the participants is inevitably so great and basic theory and practice have to be described), and fewer presentations from commercial practitioners (sometimes necessary as a quid-pro-quo for sponsorship). What was even more apparent (and more strongly expressed) than last time, was the need for participants to stream off at some point in the course in order to engage with a higher level of technical practice and/or to pursue specialisms - be it preservation techniques, colour restoration, cataloguing or video concerns. A conclusion was reached in de-briefing that the Summer School course is not long enough at three weeks and should be extended to four, mainly to allow for this kind of channelling off in the later part of the course once the basics have been adequately covered collectively. The signs are that George Eastman House, when it undertakes the next Summer School, will adopt this recommendation.

It is advisable also to schedule as much free time as possible (we allowed for a little more, but still not enough) - not just for fun and recreation (though that's necessary, too), but also to allow participants to absorb what has been taught and to catch up via paperwork if they have language difficulties. Travelling, we found this time more than before (especially in coaches) - although not avoidable altogether, eg for formal visits, commuting to and from accommodation, etc - should be kept to a minimum: it is tiring, upsetting, and very time-consuming. Social events, on the other hand, are very desirable for breaking the ice, bringing staff and participants together, and allowing people generally to let their hair down: it should be a generous part of the budgeting and include formal events such as an opening reception/dinner and a closing party with appropriate presentations. A tradition at Berkhamsted is barbecues, and again the NFTVA's Conservation Centre made a lot of friends with their customary mid-term cookout.

Again, de-briefing threw up the usual - but no less important - questions of language and whether or not to set tests or examinations at the end of the course. Language remains the impenetrable problem. The course has necessarily to be conducted in one language, ie the host language - otherwise the teaching staff would be seriously restricted, the course would double in length and become tedious as translation took

place, and the act of formal interpretation in one or more languages would be prohibitively expensive. In the end, everyone recognises this and that is why the NFTVA (for example) expects all participants to know and speak enough English to take the course successfully. Even so, there are those who inevitably arrive with little or no knowledge of the host language. There are only two (inadequate) solutions to this problem: finding staff or co-participants who can translate simultaneously for others on a person-to-person basis (although this can be distracting for neighbours); providing summaries or extracts of papers (in advance) in one or two more widely known languages (eg French or Spanish, or English if that is not the language of the course). In addition, it is very necessary for lecturers and teachers to recognise the problems of language and to use simple words and sentences and speak them slowly and carefully: this alone can make a huge difference.

Tests and exams are neither a good idea nor even feasible in a course of this kind, which is wide in subject-matter, and where the participants have varying levels of knowledge and language skills: such a system would threaten the standard of the course, and even then there would be too high an incidence of failure through no fault of the examinee. Examination is also a very daunting and stressful prospect and can undermine confidence in those whose aim is only to increase their knowledge and commune with like-minded archive colleagues from other countries. The FIAF Summer School is not structured for this kind of formality; its spirit is about taking part rather than proving that facts were learned. This is recognised by the democratic award of a Certificate of Participation to all who take the course.

One eventual answer to this, for those who feel that a more formal qualification is desirable on such occasions, is to consider another proposal which has been made at both our Summer School de-briefings, namely to encourage FIAF to set up, or commission from FIAF members, more frequent, specialised spin-off courses from the Summer School, which can be structured around specific subjects and incorporate an examination procedure to gain a recognised qualification. This is clearly something for the FIAF Executive Committee and the Commissions to consider and discuss.

As hinted at earlier in this report, the next Summer School, and probably the one after, will be held at the George Eastman House archive in Rochester, New York, and all enquiries about this should be made to Paolo Cherchi Usai. The NFTVA is pleased and grateful about this. Summer Schools are very enjoyable to run, but they are also alarmingly time-consuming and labour-intensive to prepare. After hosting a couple of them, even four years apart, it is possible to detect the weariness among the staff involved and the build-up of pressure. The NFTVA must also make room and time now for a possible technical symposium in 1998 and the FIAF Congress in 2000. It is also healthy and refreshing for the Summer School to find new venues and new approaches to the training. One archive, no matter how advanced, cannot know it all and cannot teach all the valid alternatives which other archives may practise. And there is nothing to prevent the experience of earlier Summer Schools and their trainers to be drawn upon by the new host.

GEH, with its new archive training faculty, seems an excellent choice for the next Summer Schools and we confidently pass the baton to Paolo. A few final words of advice as we do so: start preparing early (now is not too soon!); be clear and concise about the curriculum you choose as far in advance as possible; build in as much hands-on activity as possible; involve the archive staff at all levels - everyone can be taught to teach if they have knowledge to impart; schedule problem-solving clinics

(all archivists bring special local technical problems with them - fun for others to solve as well) and de-brief with both participants and staff at the end of the course; cosset and look after the participants, collect them from the airport, indulge their needs - many will feel disoriented and insecure; get or appoint a full-time co-ordinator - at least for the latter stages of your preparation and the School itself; be generous, especially with hospitality - many participants will also be short of cash; be realistic about the budget and make sure you can afford to run a Summer School!

Let me say finally that the Summer Schools organised by the NFTVA have been extraordinarily rewarding and enjoyable, not least for the opportunity to meet so many different members of the FIAF family from so many countries. Apart from paying tribute to them and their sense of adventure, allow me to thank this time the entire staff of the NFTVA for their contributions, but most especially Henning Schou, Fred Mollitor, Kathleen Dickson, Anne Fleming, Tony Cook, Kevin Patton, Joao Oliveira, Michael Caldwell, Steve Bryant, Bryony Dixon, Sarah Davy, Linda Kaye, James Patterson, David Meeker, Elaine Burrows, Olwen Terris, Jane Hockings, Jan Faull, Jon Cawsey, Karin Bryant, Brian Jenkinson, Jerry Rodgers, Simon Baker, Martin Coffill, Don Geary and Harold Brown. Honorary lecturers, to whom we are most grateful for their time, included Kevin Brownlow, Grant Lobban, Jerry Kuehl, Jack Houshold, Claude Lerouge and Michelle Aubert.

Paolo - take it away!

CJ/17.4.97