

The International Federation of Film Archives

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There are at least five significant collections of historic motion picture film in Australia, and three of these may be described as film archives. Two are situated in Canberra, one at the Australian War Memorial, and the other, the National Film Archive, at the National Library. The third is the State Film Archives within the Battye Library of West Australian History in Perth.

The National Library has been a full member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF — Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film) for twenty-five years now. The only other member in Australia is the State Film Archives of Western Australia which was admitted to Observer status in FIAF in 1980. Traditionally, FIAF has recognised only one archive in each country as eligible for full membership, but there are exceptions, particularly as a result of the expansion of film preservation activities in western countries. Observer status is appropriate for smaller archives whose collections are of a regional character or otherwise specialised nature.

Each year FIAF holds a general meeting which is followed by a symposium, the former being in the nature of a business meeting and the latter dealing with technical, aesthetic or other vital aspects of film collection, preservation, study etc. The meetings are hosted by the national archive of the country chosen by FIAF for the occasion, and, with a few exceptions, have generally been held in Europe. All members and observers are entitled to participate in the meetings and symposiums, but, because of the distance involved, Australia's participation has been intermittent. However, contact with FIAF and its member archives in Europe has improved greatly in recent years. Mr Ray Edmondson, Chief Film Officer at the National Library, attended the meeting at Brighton, England in 1978, and Western Australia was represented in 1980 at Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia. Three officers of Australia's National Film Archive have attended summer schools on film preservation held under FIAF's auspices in East Germany.

FIAF was founded in 1938, when there were only a handful of film archives in the world. In 1980, there were forty-four full members and

twenty-one observers in a total of forty-nine countries. Thirty-three full members were present at the 1980 meeting, together with a number of observers and guests. This report summarises some of the topics of importance to FIAF which were discussed at the meeting and symposium.

The FIAF secretariat is located in Brussels and consists of an office with a small full-time staff. Day-to-day management of the affairs of FIAF is in the hands of an Executive Committee. However, much of the ongoing work of the Federation is performed by committees which, for example, are studying various aspects of film preservation, preparing publications, collecting information, etc. In addition, there is a regular publication, *FIAF Bulletin*. The high level of activity of the committees can be seen from the number of publications issued or in preparation.

Film Cataloguing

The Cataloguing Committee has issued a manual entitled *Film Cataloguing* which is a compendium of cataloguing and control practices, in member archives. Another publication deals with the experience of seven member archives in the use of computers for film cataloguing. In the course of preparation are:

1. A Glossary of Filmographic Terms
2. A Bibliography of Filmographic Sources
3. International Standards for Film Cataloguing

Documentation

The Documentation Committee appears to have been at least as busy as the Cataloguing Committee, with the following titles to their credit, either already published or in course of preparation.

1. FIAF Classification Scheme for Literature on Film and Television (published by ASLIB, 1980).
2. FIAF Directory of Film and Television Documentation Sources (revised 2nd ed. imminent).
3. UNESCO Feasibility Study for an International Documentation Centre.
4. International Directory of Cinematographers, Set and Costume Designers (imminent).
5. International Directory to Dissertations on Cinema (in preparation).
6. International Index to Film and Television Periodicals (published by FIAF, 1980).

Film Preservation

Of fundamental importance to any film archive is the complex subject of film preservation. A new manual on film preservation has been issued

by the Preservation Committee and a companion manual on magnetic tape preservation is in preparation.

Other Projects and Publications

FIAF has established a close liaison with UNESCO and has been accorded B-status with that organisation. FIAF participated in the drafting of UNESCO's Recommendation on the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images. In addition, FIAF has prepared for UNESCO a feasibility study on the establishment of an international documentation and training centre for moving images. A UNESCO subsidy has enabled participants from developing countries to attend a FIAF summer school.

The Canadian Film Archive sponsored the publication of a Bibliography of members' publications for 1979.

The Bulgarian Film Archive reported that it was working on an extensive history of the cinema in which seventy-one countries were participating. The first section, from the beginning until 1914, was already under way.

Discussion Topics

Foremost among the topics in the Open Forum section of the meeting was the subject of colour film preservation. This had received much attention in the trade, technical and film-study press, and was obviously a matter of primary concern to film archivists in almost every country. Briefly, the problem is that Eastmancolor and similar film-stocks that have gradually displaced Technicolor over the past twenty years use colour dyes that are much less stable than those of the Technicolor process and many of the earlier Eastmancolor films have faded quite badly. Even some relatively recent films have started to fade.

The problem is not without available solutions, but these are expensive and often impractical at a time when archives are suffering an erosion of their funds through inflation. One of the most satisfactory methods is to use three colour separations on black-and-white film, which is in fact the same method by which the images were stored in the old Technicolor process. Today, it is an extremely expensive solution, costing in the order of \$30,000 for a feature-length film.

An alternative option is to store colour originals at sub-zero temperatures and so to retard the fading process. To construct and operate a cold-storage facility within the necessarily tight limits of temperature and humidity is also expensive, but at least within the reach of some archives institutions. A further option is to store colour films using a new "low-fade master" material introduced by Eastman Kodak. This is much more expensive than the usual master copying films and producers are reluctant to spend the extra money. A film's original

negative and master material are likely to remain in the producer's hands for many years and may not reach a film archive until fading has commenced.

Preservation even of black-and-white film is not without its problems. Some film archives have received enormous quantities of old inflammable nitrate film in recent years and have undertaken long-term copying programmes which will not be completed until after the turn of the century. With the almost total shift to colour in film production nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to get black-and-white film processed satisfactorily by commercial laboratories, and some film archives have therefore set up their own black-and-white printing and processing facilities.

A radically different type of colour process, digital storage methods and the videodisc were suggested as further ways of ensuring the long term preservation of colour images.

Symposium on Film Selection

The formal meeting was followed by a symposium in which the problems of selecting material for preservation were discussed.

Papers were presented by a number of archivists, and were followed by general discussion. Mr C. Jeavons from the British National Film Archive described the selection procedures of his institution. In his introductory remarks, he endeavoured to answer the question, "why do we select?"

He said that he was a reluctant believer in the need for any selection by a film archive. He approached the question with apprehension because he felt that future generations might see things differently from the way we see them today. He went back to 1935 when Ernest Lindgren, who established the British Archive, realised that the costs of total archiving of film would overwhelm the resources available. Lindgren devised a policy which aimed at coming to realistic decisions. Firstly it was recognised that the British Archive could not take on the film preservation burden of the whole world and it therefore confined itself to any film shown in Britain, regardless of its source or nationality. Lindgren insisted in the importance of film as sociological and historic documents, as records of events, places and people. He saw the need to seek advice from experts and he established the first selection sub-committee over forty years ago. The selection procedures have evolved considerably in the ensuing years and there are now several committees, each dealing with a specific area.

The discussion revealed that while there might be concern about the problems of selection and preservation of film, television was also an enormous problem in its own right. The losses of television material were described as vast (in the United States, about 50% prior to 1970). Currently the British Archive tapes each day the two main television

news bulletins. In the U.S.A., Vanderbilt University started taping television news in 1968, and was followed by the National Archives in 1974. (It is not unreasonable to suggest that we should be doing the same thing in Australia).

Future FIAF meetings

Each year FIAF discusses possible venues for future meetings. In 1981 the meeting is to take place in Italy, and Australia will again be represented. In 1982 it will be in Mexico, and invitations for later years have been received from Australia, Austria, the United States and West Berlin. It is therefore quite possible that in the next few years Australia will be host to FIAF for the first time.