



NEWSREEL is the Newsletter of the British Federation of Film Societies, and is distributed from the BFFS Central Office at the Ritz Building, Mount Pleasant Campus, Swansea SA1 6ED. All enquiries should be addressed to BFFS Office Manager Chris Hill, either by telephoning 01792 481170, or by emailing him at bffs-admin@sihe.ac.uk. Correspondence about the contents of NEWSREEL is welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the above address.

UGC CINEMA HOSTS FILMSOC

For the past two years Slough Cooperative Film Society has used as its venue the UGC cinema in Slough town centre. Dudley Smithers, SCFS Chair, explains how it works: 'UGC provides the screen (currently 80 seats, with bar area) every Tuesday evening, we programme the films, and then UGC books, obtains and projects them. UGC also includes information about our films in their leaflets and local newspaper advertising, and on their website. We provide a guaranteed audience and a good relationship for the cinema with the people of Slough through our work in the community and with other organisations.

With screenings open to the public we have increased our membership and the viewing audience.' UGC Cinemas has offered to host national and regional BFFS events where possible and are seeking to expand their involvement with film societies in the following areas across the UK: Aberdeen, Dundee, Liverpool, Cardiff, Boldon, Hull, Middlesbrough, Bolton, Wigan, Brighton, Northampton, Bedford, Harlow, Eastbourne, Swindon and Gloucester. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Dudley on 01784 434868 or at dudley.jo@virgin.net.

SPRING VIEWING SESSIONS BIRMINGHAM - MARCH 12TH/13TH

After the disappointing lack of Autumn National Viewing Sessions last year, due to funding restrictions, we are thrilled to be able to announce a special Spring National Viewing Session this March. In celebration of 80 years of the film society movement in the UK, and as recognition for the exceptional support shown by our members during last year's *annus horribilis*, entry to this year's SNVS will be free!

We still need to know if you're attending as we have a limit on numbers, so you **must** register - read on for details - and complete and return the enclosed booking form ASAP. The event is open to all film society members but remember, to qualify for attendance your film society must be a current BFFS member (so get your BFFS membership renewal in promptly).

Future issues of NewsReel will bring you snippets from the history of film societies in the UK, and throughout this year we'll be marking 80 glorious years in suitable fashion as the all-new BFFS emerges.

So, to details of the SNVS. We have temporarily left our usual Spring venue of the National Film Theatre due to major refurbishments, which have truncated their programming period and have made our favoured dates unavailable. But every cloud has a silver lining; this has enabled us to develop relationships with UGC Cinemas, who have already been supportive of the film society movement (see sidebar). For this year's SNVS they have made available two screens in their Birmingham Broad Street 12-screen complex, located in the heart of the UK's vibrant second city and close to all main transport links and a wealth of accommodation options.

A map and contact details for a selection of hotels and B&Bs within easy reach of the venue are enclosed. A multiplex location is something of a departure for National Viewing Sessions and while we have every expectation of it proving successful, and hope

to repeat the exercise, we value your views—so do let us know what you think.

A preliminary list of titles is enclosed in this mailing. By popular demand this includes a greater number of new releases and previews than in previous years, and many titles that you're unlikely to catch outside of London or film festivals. We wish to thank our colleagues Catharine Des Forges and Robin Baker at The Independent Cinema Office (ICO) for lending their expertise in securing what we think is the best line-up for a number of years.

With two screens and an exclusive delegates' area at UGC Birmingham Broad Street, over 16 features and shorts will be on show, tea and coffee will be available and representatives from allied companies will be on hand to answer your questions about digital projection, DVD hire etc. We will also be welcoming ICO staff and clients to this year's event. All-in-all, this will be a great opportunity to catch up with old friends, find out about the latest technology developments and enhance your film society title selection.

Presentation of the BFFS Film Society of the Year Awards (FSoy) will be made on Saturday 12th March in a glittering evening event, with a distinguished VIP award-presenter and guests in attendance. As well as receiving unique specially-commissioned mementos and certificates, winners will be invited to attend the evening reception afterwards, so get your FSoy applications in soon (deadline 13th February). For anyone whose appetite for film has not been sated by the daytime screenings, UGC have generously offered concessionary tickets to delegates for all evening performances at Broad Street. Welcome back to the BFFS viewing sessions! This event will be a fitting tribute to our members' loyalty and 80 years of the film society movement.

For the latest updates see the BFFS website at www.bffs.org.uk.

ENTER NOW FOR THE FILM SOCIETY OSCARS

It's that time of the year again, when you get the chance to tell us what is special about your society. Are you proud of your wide-ranging programme of films, your new website, the brilliant lay-out of your brochure or the way you have increased

your membership with exciting ideas for marketing? Last year, 21 societies made over fifty submissions in the eight categories and the resulting competition served to underline the wealth of ideas and diversity that exists within our movement. The

winners of the coveted Engholm Prize for Film Society of the Year were **Reel People** from the North Somerset village of Kilmersdon receiving the top award for a record second time since the society was set up in 1999. There were many other winning and commended societies in the other categories from **Heartland** in Perthshire, judged the Best New Society, to **Bracknell**, many miles to the south, for Best Programme Notes.

You will have received details of this year's FSoY Awards in the last mailing. Don't forget you must make a separate submission for each award category, each accompanied by a copy of the entry form together with any supporting material you want to send. The deadline for entries is 13th February, so get those entries in and prepare to walk down the red carpet at the FSoY Awards ceremony on Saturday 12th March at the Birmingham UGC (Broad Street may not be Hollywood Boulevard but we can dream!)



'Reel People' are presented with Film Society of the Year award 2004 by David Miller, BFFS Vice-Chair (now Chair)

UKFC-FUNDED KIT WILL BRING REGIONAL BENEFITS

Film societies throughout the UK will benefit from equipment worth £55,000 which has now been ordered by BFFS. As reported by NewsReel in December 2004, BFFS's successful bid to the UKFC's Digital Fund for Non-theatrical Exhibition has made funds available for the provision of equipment to regional groups, and the procurement process is well in hand.

'It has been an interesting exercise', said Ian Kerr, BFFS's Scottish Regional rep and the ManCom member charged with the responsibility for turning UKFC largesse into real benefits for film society members. 'We looked at our experience in Scotland and decided to build sets of equipment which would suit the widest possible range of venues'.

'We really have tried to think of everything. These are the most completely specified sets of equipment we could come up with. Down to the last cable and speaker-bag, they should fit the bill. The only thing missing for a successful

event is a couple of inflatable bouncers'.

Scotland's experience has been largely with Sanyo projectors, which have proved robust and long-lived, and BFFS has elected to base most of its regional equipment sets on projectors from Sanyo's current range. These projectors offer significant additional benefits, including (unusually) a capacity to accept alternative lenses, and each loan Sanyo will have both a long-throw and a standard lens.

Readers who are familiar with the ongoing LCD versus DLP debate will probably know that Sanyo projectors are LCD-based, but that they offer high contrast ratios and minimal pixellation compared with most LCD projectors. Experience has also shown that they offer exceptionally high definition at large image sizes. The user interface is clear and straightforward, and Ian reckons that loan users will be able to make basic use of the machines even without training.

'Experienced loan users should be able to use the equipment fully with a brief familiarisation session,' he said. 'but we intend to organise full training sessions in the near future, both regionally and at the BFFS National events. These will enable users to get the best out of the complete set of equipment, including setting up 5:1 Dolby Sound, projection in all image ratios and adapting the equipment to different venues'.

Final decisions have yet to be made about where the projection kits will be kept, but these decisions are likely to be taken in the near future. Experience in both Scotland and the South-West indicates that they will each be managed by a named individual in a specified location. In Scotland a charge of £20 is made for each loan, to cover replacement bulb purchase, and this too will feature in ManCom's discussions. But whatever the outcome, the aim is to make one of these kits available in your region very soon.

FILM SOCIETIES AND THE PUBLIC VIDEO SCREENING LICENCE

Film society committees have often been known to wonder why they have to pay – and pass on to their members – the hefty shipping costs incurred by getting a DVD from the distributor to the venue and back, when mail-order shipping for the same DVD is minimal. Everbody agrees that the studio and the distributor need to collect a payment whenever a film is shown, but why can't you just buy the movie from HMV, and pay for the permission separately?

Recent visitors to Filmbank's website could be forgiven for thinking that now, you can. Filmbank, the biggest renter of films on DVD to film societies by a long way, has introduced a new licensing arrangement for showing films in public 'for no charge to fixed audiences'. This arrangement, the Public Video Screening Licence (PVSL), entails a single payment, on a scale starting at £75, for a whole year for a specific venue, based on the anticipated size of the audience for each film. It covers showing films on VHS or DVD only, and the tape or DVD has to be bought or hired in the exhibitor's own locality. No charge can be made for admission, and there can be no public advertising of the event.

There are other rules, but none of them seem to rule out the possibility of running a film society by renting a room in a venue which itself has a PVSL, and simply sharing the costs of room rental and DVD purchase among the audience. None of them, that is, but one. 'The screening of films', say the guidelines on Filmbank's website, 'must not be the main business or activity of the licensee'.

Now, in the above example, it would not be 'the main business of the licensee' (the venue operator), but nevertheless, the intent is clear enough. PVSLs are not intended for film societies. It is not hard to see why. If there are 200 film societies in the UK renting 20 films a year each, and Filmbank has around half of that business, its gross receipts

from film societies are going to be around £120,000 every year.

And there the matter would rest, if it were not for the fact that Filmbank has muddied the water somewhat, by mailing details of the PVSL directly to film societies. This has caused NewsReel to look closely at the terms and conditions under which PVSLs are granted. Our conclusion is that all but one of the terms and conditions would permit the operation of a film society specifically organised to meet them, and that this would be a very favourable way of operating, offering numerous advantages. The single problematic condition is the one quoted above.

In other words, it looks as if the local fishing club can obtain a PVSL, but you can't. Even if you only show films on 20 evenings a year, which might reasonably be described as 'occasionally', and even if you meet all the other terms and conditions. This struck NewsReel as discriminatory, and we phoned Filmbank to ask how they justified it.

'Er, yes, well...' said Filmbank's Tom Bairstow. We nodded, encouragingly. 'The PVSL is so you can show films to people who aren't really there to watch films', he told us. We tried to wrap our heads around this concept. 'The film has to be secondary to the main reason they are there', he added, helpfully. We found ourselves reaching for the Anadin. 'Like, for example, a school showing a film to amuse kids on a rainy afternoon, or a bar showing old movies with the sound turned off as a sort of, you know, cool backdrop'. Palpitations started. We had to sit down.

So there you have it. The only potential PVSL application of interest to film societies that he would concede was the instance of outreach filmshows in pensioners' daycare centres, with the centre as the licensee. For the rest, it was a beautiful dream.

FUNDING UPDATE

The good news is that, as reported in the last edition of NewsReel, in November UKFC agreed to the funding submission for the remainder of 2004-05 and was duly invoiced in early December. The not-so-good news is that as of mid January, no money has been received.

The approved funding amount still falls short of the £100k requested at the beginning of 2004 due to the removal of the BFFS role in programming support, and other abandoned activities. Exactly how and by whom these services are to be delivered to the film society sector is yet to be clarified, but for the Spring National Viewing Sessions the Independent Cinema Office is being used to secure and book titles.

The next task is to work with the UKFC to agree activities and funding for 2005-06. We need to establish how programming support is to be supplied and gain agreement for a re-structure that allows BFFS to deliver exceptional service and support to members, as well as meet the needs of UKFC for the voluntary, non-theatrical exhibition sector.

Since the last edition of NewsReel it has been clarified that certainly for the foreseeable future, the *bfi* will not be including direct services to film societies in their current activities review.

HELP US TO HELP YOU

One of BFFS's primary roles is to give practical support to Film Societies. It was with this in mind that BFFS has been investigating whether we could secure a Public Liability Insurance Scheme that would be significantly cheaper than an individual society could obtain, which would be designed exclusively for Film Societies, and which would be for BFFS members only. We have made good progress with this and now have the policy details of a suitable scheme.

Now, this is where you can help us. We need to compare the details of this scheme with others. So that we are able to do this would you please photocopy the details of your scheme and send them to BFFS Treasurer Dave Phillips, Ty-Bryn, Tal-y-coed, Monmouth NP25 5HR.

If your society has someone who is suitably qualified in insurance matters and is willing to pass an opinion on this scheme please ask them to contact Dave or send him their contact details.

Your reward will not be in heaven but hopefully in the form of a much cheaper Public Liability Insurance Policy for your Society.

SO THAT'S WHAT HE LOOKS LIKE—THAT NICE MAN IN SWANSEA

Chris Hill joined the BFFS team in Swansea in April last year as Office Manager. After 40 years in London, most of it in bookselling and publishing, Chris had planned to return to the land of his poetic fathers with the same trade in mind. He was, however, happy to be diverted into working for the film society movement, which he finds just as culturally congenial, though rather more of a challenge, especially since last September when he became, somewhat unexpectedly, BFFS's sole full-time employee. As Chris sees it "in this, its eightieth year, there is exciting potential for the film society movement as now the longstanding commitment and enthusiasm of



the membership has been given fresh impetus by the advent of the new digital technology. I very much look forward to helping make the most of our eightieth year".

MANCOM REPORT

ManCom is the rather prosaic abbreviation for the Federation's Management Committee, made up of elected and appointed members from all over the UK. If the funding crisis of the past year has had one positive effect, it is has been to galvanise ManCom into improving the services on offer to member societies.

So the first meeting after the Federation's AGM, held at the Resource Centre on London's Holloway Road, was dominated by discussion of progress on a number of initiatives including the updating of the Film Society Handbook, the development of the website and the ordering of the sets of equipment following the successful bid to the Digital Fund. Best news was the completion of the first Newsletter for some time and the pending delivery of 'How to Start a Film Society' brochures produced by ManCom with the sponsorship of Filmbank.

There were also updates on the effects on film societies of the new Licensing Act, the prospect of inexpensive public liability and equipment insurance for members, and discussions with the ICO on the Spring Viewing Sessions. The so-so news was the feedback from the latest meeting with UKFC—see the Funding Update on the previous page. All of which did not dampen ManCom's determination to leave the disappointments of 2004 behind them and make the 80th Anniversary year one to remember.

Brian Clay

REPORTS FROM AROUND THE REGIONS SUMMER AND AUTUMN 2004

YORKSHIRE DIARY

15 July: Tony Davison and I do a trial screening for a prospective new society at Bramhope (Leeds). Great response, about 120 people crammed into small church hall. Showed *Touching the Void*, went well. Society was later set up.

Tony continues to bring film culture to the wilds of North Yorkshire. Most recently in Staintondale and Foston-on-the-Wold.

4 August: Usual mad rush to get Yorkshire leaflet to bed before my holidays.

9 August: Collected leaflet proofs from printer. Designer seems to have misunderstood what we wanted, has printed all programme details in white on grey, over a huge still - virtually unreadable. Sorted this out tactfully (I think).

16 August: 10,000 copies now winging their way round the county.

September: Yorkshire Group website now up and running at www.yrg-bffs.org

thanks to Henry Iles.

Most societies start their seasons. Block Booking Scheme swings into action (212 bookings this year). Usual problems with VHS tapes being sent instead of DVDs.

22-26 September: Silent Film Festival at Scarborough. Highlight - new print of *Piccadilly* (UK 1929) with local lad, Charles Laughton.

3/5 December: Annual film weekend at Cober Hill. Spanish films plus some vintage 50s Hollywood. Sold out this year with people being turned away. Great programme and organisation thanks to the indefatigable Tony D. The food was well up to usual high standard - historic full Yorkshire breakfasts. Had informal Group Committee meeting. We agreed to try and arrange a Yorkshire viewing session in Hebden Bridge using both the Picture House and The Little Theatre, probably in late April.

Richard Fort

SOUTH-WEST GROUP

Aug/Sep: 10,000 copies of *Film South West 17*, expanded to 20 pages to accommodate the listings for 50+ societies, were distributed throughout the region.

Sep/Dec: Thirty societies signed up for the Group's block booking scheme with a total of 147 screenings from the ten titles selected from *Lost in Translation* to *Goodbye Lenin!*

Nov: Regional Viewing at the Athenaeum Centre, Warminster attended by 95 delegates from 23 societies. Top titles were *The Story of the Weeping Camel* and *The Motorcycle Diaries*, both under consideration

for the 2005/06 block booking scheme.

Nov/Dec: Trial screenings successfully organised in Chard, Guernsey and Keynsham, all looking likely to result in new societies in 2005. Newent, north of Gloucester is set to join them this month after becoming one of the eleven successful applicants to the UKFC Digital Fund in the South West. For further news, visit the SW Group's website at www.bffssouthwest.org.uk where you can access the latest Newsletter—No.91.

Brian Clay

BFFS'S POSTER LIBRARY TAKES OFF

Brian Clay writes—one of the best-kept secrets of the Federation is the Poster Archive located at the Swansea office, which has over 600 posters available for BFFS members to borrow. The titles covered include many films booked by societies over the past 25 years from Scorsese's *After Hours* to Woody Allen's *Zelig*.

Most of the collection is held as quad posters (102x88cm), and it also includes some classic titles such as Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* and *M. Hulot's Holiday*, *L'Avventura* and Fellini's *Roma*. The cur-

rent list, available electronically from the Swansea office and soon to be linked to the BFFS website, features releases up to the late 90s.

Over the next few months, the Archive is to be updated, with posters for more recent titles transferred from the South-West Group's library, which is currently run by Tim Mugford (for details see www.bffssouthwest.org.uk). So if you are planning a revival of *The Draughtsman's Contract* or a Coen Brothers season, there could be a poster for you!

