



# NEWSREEL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BRITISH FEDERATION OF FILM SOCIETIES

OCTOBER 2005

## EIGHTY YEARS ON

It was in 1925 that the first official film society was formed. Eighty years ago – more than many people's lifetime. And it's pretty safe to assume that film societies existed before 1925 – there's a conjecture that Ivor Montagu, the leading light of the early film society movement, was a member of one when he first saw *Dr. Caligari's Cabinet*, while at Cambridge University in 1919. Now, here we are in 2005, with the film society movement in apparent good health, growing once again, and bearing a whole range of obvious resemblances to its earliest forebears.

How come? What, among all the enormous changes to society, to the economy and geography of Britain and the world, and to the science and technology that underpins the whole of moving picture culture, has remained so constant that a situation is still created in which film societies are the best, the only viable answer to the problem of seeing good film.

In the years following WWI, European countries woke up to the fact that while we'd been busy destroying each other, the US film industry had been even busier, setting itself up on cheap land in Hollywood for a phase of unparalleled expansion. Even then, the movie moguls knew that the home market in the US was not big enough for their ambitions, and when they set up their plans to export films, and to produce them overseas, Britain's English-speaking population was right at the top of their list of target markets. By 1920, a large number of the films shown in Britain were American, and US production companies were buying interests in Britain's cinema chains, distribution companies and film production companies, to make quite sure that no-one could challenge their commercial supremacy.

Naturally, there was a reaction against this, and the start of the film society movement was part of this reaction. The Film Society, the fabled London-based group which set the template for most of what we do today, was determined to obtain and show films which were excluded from commercial distribution. Sound familiar? In

their case, they were intent on obtaining films from socialist Russia, from eastern Europe, from all the exotic locations in which they knew good films were being made, which were being ignored by commercial exhibition. Ring a bell? And they were catholic in their tastes, mounting programmes which mixed films from Russia and America, narrative and documentary films, shorts and full-length features.

### BIRTHDAYS IN 2005

A number of BFFS member societies enjoyed a significant anniversary in 2005. Here we celebrate some of our oldest members.

Cheltenham	60
Harrogate	50
Ipswich	70
Lincoln	52
Manchester and Salford	75
Stafford	55
Slough	59

Many Happy Returns! And apologies to all those who responded, but are not lauded here. We set the bar at a quite unreasonable 50.

It must be clear that today we have not moved far beyond that passionate, enquiring, humane view of the value and potential of film culture. One reason for this has to be that the circumstances of commercial film exhibition have not changed one whit. It is still as US-dominated, centralised and bottom-line driven now as it was back then. So one answer to the question, how far have we moved in 80 years has to be, hardly at all. But there are other things to consider.

Firstly, there is BFFS. It was not until after WWII that a federation of film societies was finally set up, and for the first 20 or 30 years of its existence, it operated on a pretty tenuous financial basis. Nevertheless, the federation survived, and is still around today, but its job now is very different to what it once was. This is chiefly because of the revolution in the social role of voluntary organisations that has taken place since the 1980s. Some would say BFFS has been slow in reacting to these changed circumstances, compared with a number of not-for-profit organisations. Nowadays, Oxfam, for example, is a big, effective business, a developed and professional contributor to aid on a global basis. Thirty years ago, it was by no means so far advanced.

BFFS's role now is to give *professional* support to film societies, to make sure they can start up, grow and prosper, offering the best service they can to their local audience. To do this it needs to be active at the national level, arguing for a better deal for film societies with the UKFC, the film distributors and anyone else who affects your situation. It needs to be active at the regional level, offering organised services in regions which cover the whole country. All this takes resources, a sound strategic plan, and effective personnel. We're not there yet, but we're on the way.

The other thing which has changed, and which is having profound effects on the way film societies operate, is technology. The digital revolution is only just starting, and it's already apparent that DVD projection is liberating us from celluloid, making the business of showing films both cheaper and easier. The distribution industry is the laggard now, and will become more so as network distribution becomes not just technically possible, but easy. Many film societies are well up to speed in this regard, but the complexities of the new situation place a heavy burden on BFFS to explain, to enable new solutions, and to represent film societies' interests as matters develop.

Eighty years? It feels like yesterday (ooh, me back...).

# AUTUMN VIEWING SESSIONS MAKE A COMEBACK

## SHEFFIELD 11-13 NOVEMBER

Following the highly successful national viewing event at the UGC Birmingham in March and your high praise of the venue our autumn session is again to be held in a top UK multiplex. The 20-screen Cineworld Sheffield (formerly UGC) is hosting the 2005 ANVS over a weekend in November. With the sole use of 2 screens and fully exclusive delegate area, attendees will be able to choose from over 15 features and shorts, selected and secured with the help of the Independent Cinema Office. Cineworld Sheffield is located just a short tram trip from the city centre and other transport routes, and with plentiful accommodation options in the area, the weekend offers a packed programme.

In a special archive presentation Sue Howard, Director of the Yorkshire Film Archive, will illustrate how valuable film material from over the past 80 years has been saved, restored and is now accessible to film societies all over the UK. There will also be an opportunity for student film societies to network at a facilitated seminar,

share their experience and help us understand their particular needs.

The reinstatement of the BFFS autumn national viewing event has in part been made possible by the restoration of UKFC funding to BFFS (see page 3 for funding report). And very glad we are to have it. However, with reduced circumstances we've reverted to a charge for the weekend, but kept it modest to ensure as many film society members as possible can attend this showcase screening and conference event. Additional funding from Regional Screen Agency Screen Yorkshire has facilitated special events and kept ticket costs low, and Jay Arnold from Screen Yorkshire has assisted greatly in helping us access local facilities. The screenings are also open to invited non-members and exhibitors within the area and we hope to see some new faces from other film societies from around the country.

We've received fantastic support from within the BFFS membership, most especially from Tony Davison, regional constituency rep, and considerable contributions to running costs from the North West Regional Group and from Bracknell Film Society.

Finally, to social events. Our autumn

conference is known for the great socialising opportunities as well as great titles and this year is no exception. The weekend kicks off with a FREE reception at the Cineworld multiplex together with a screening. The delegate bar is open all weekend for the purchase of refreshments, with FREE tea and coffee available to delegates. The BFFS Annual Dinner promises to be something of an extra special occasion. Held at the historic and exclusive Cutler's Hall located in the heart of the city, in the presence of the Deputy Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Councillor Jackie Drayton, the event's keynote speech marking 80 years of the film society movement will be given by a guest speaker very familiar to film society audiences.

The BFFS Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday afternoon at the Cineworld.

Further information on the event and booking is enclosed with this mailing, together with booking form, maps and information on accommodation options. For up to date information on the titles screening and our special guest speaker please check [www.bffs.org.uk](http://www.bffs.org.uk)

Welcome to Sheffield, sit back and enjoy the show.



Cineworld is proud to be hosting the  
**BFFS Autumn National Viewing Session**



# NEW FUNDING AGREEMENT — WINNERS AND LOSERS

This year sees the film society movement in the UK celebrate its 80th birthday. The oldest continuous film society in the UK, possibly the world, will be 75 years old and my congratulations and every wish for a successful year go to the committee and members of Manchester and Salford Film Society. Never has there been a time when film societies have so much going on and so much to offer, nor when so many new societies are being formed. Now, with a new funding agreement with the UK Film Council in place from September, BFFS is well-placed to support them.

Last year, BFFS had to cope with a substantial cut in funding from previous years, while continuing to deliver a whole host of services to the entire sector. Despite this cut, we achieved an outstanding Spring National Viewing Session/Annual Awards Ceremony at Birmingham, only made possible by exceptional additional voluntary efforts. And while we welcome a new start with UKFC, we must admit disappointment in what is effectively a further reduction on previous years' funding.

We are working hard to identify other possible sources of funds: in the meantime we will endeavour to ensure you see no dilution of the support, advice and advocacy that you, and all those involved with the voluntary non-theatrical cinema sector, fully deserve. Inevitably there will be impact on the speed of progress we had planned, but we will not sacrifice the new impetus we have achieved in the last year. The passion and commitment exhibited by those who run and support film societies together with the freedom to screen a self-selected programme, motivates to make an immense difference and a significant contribution to the whole film economy. It is our job to

persuade and convince the funding establishment that film societies deserve their support and that BFFS is the best-placed body to deliver it, and it is this job that will remain our first priority.

Film has the power to draw communities together and aid awareness of cultures from across the world. Technology has simplified the process of screening a film, and has made setting up a film society much cheaper. In 2004, UKFC granted a substantial sum to BFFS to allow the purchase of multiple sets of DVD projection equipment and these are now available for use around the country. Once again, BFFS has had to rely on its excellent network of regional representatives to take on an ever-increasing workload, yet funding for regional activities has been more severely cut than any other area. BFFS is the only body capable of delivering the required nationwide assistance and expertise, and believes adequate funding to support and expand regional group activity is essential to facilitate this. This view is apparently not shared by UKFC, and we shall be asking them to resolve this anomaly with the Regional Screen Agencies whom they also fund.

The prime reason for forming a film society is to be able to see films that otherwise would be ignored, by-passed by the commercial exhibitors. How often have we heard film critics inform readers and viewers that 'this is a brilliant film, but it will probably only ever be seen in London.' Rubbish! Film societies across Britain will probably be making it available to appreciative local audiences. Through its selection of titles for the national spring and autumn viewing sessions, BFFS has championed world cinema for over 50

years. Attended by thousands of film community representatives, these sessions have enlightened audiences across the UK, as is clearly shown by the excellence of film society programming over the years. Our new funding agreement no longer encompasses this activity, but we know that to relinquish this strategy of proven success will not work. We can accept that, for the time being, UKFC will not fund BFFS for such activity, but we will never accept that it is not a fit and proper service for BFFS to offer its membership and the wider voluntary screening sector.

In the meantime, viewing sessions are safe: BFFS will continue to work with partners, and seek funds to allow us to host screening sessions in the way we know will work. Widening audience appreciation does include getting more people to watch films, but of longer lasting importance is the process of exposing an existing audience to a broader range of material, so they may be enthused and motivated into acting as amateurs and ambassadors, going on to form film societies and to perpetuate the virtuous circle that is typified by the BFFS.

BFFS has endured for the last 60 years. Quangos, Government departments, and Governments themselves, come and go. The BFFS is the one constant supporter of the voluntary cinema sector. This is a role we fulfil with pride. We never lose sight that we are custodians of a long heritage as well as advocates for the future. While we accept we need to adapt to meet new demands, we will continue to campaign on behalf of the entire sector, lobbying MPs and proving to the UKFC just what a treasure they have in BFFS.

*David Miller, Chairman BFFS*

**ARE YOU A SIGHT AND SOUND SUBSCRIBER, OR A MEMBER OF THE NFT?  
YES? THEN READ ON...**

Julia Vickers, who will be well known to most of you as our former vice-Chair, and who is currently working as a consultant to BFFS, has been nominated for election as Member Governor on the Board of the British Film Institute. When ballot papers are issued, we wholeheartedly urge you to cast your vote in Julia's favour.

## FANCY STARTING A FILM GROUP?

Every fortnight, my wife goes off to her book group. They can't fool me. I know they have a great time, because when they hold meetings at our house, I can hear them at it, as I sit alone, shivering in the coalhouse (OK, I made the last bit up). And I know my wife gets to read a really interesting range of books. I'm not jealous, exactly, but if someone said 'would you like to join?', I'd say, 'yes please, just as long as we can talk about films'.

So why don't film groups exist? Why isn't there a long-standing, well-supported movement, across the UK, of groups meeting regularly to view and talk about interesting movies? In many ways, you'd think running a film group would be easier than running a book group; you get together, you pour the wine, you watch the DVD, and you talk. None of that bothersome, time-consuming reading, none of those muttered excuses about only getting half-way through Chapter 1, just a straightforward, stimulating one-off event, repeated as frequently as the group wants.

And when it comes to film societies, you'd think there would be even more

motivation. Here's a group of people who all *know* that everyone else there likes film. Of course, not everyone who goes to a film society's film shows will be interested in a film group. But that's fine, because to be successful, a film group would have to be smaller than an audience. And if your topic of discussion was the film the society had just shown, you'd be able to save the time of showing it and get down to the nitty gritty right away.

But there has to be a downside, doesn't there? One issue might be this. Book groups have been around for a while, and they're an accepted part of the cultural scene. They are very well supported by the publishing industry, because all the indications are that they get more people reading more often, and they certainly push book sales up. But the film industry is a very different beast, one which is not at all keen on you showing a DVD to your best mate, let alone ten relative strangers.

Of course, what you do in your own house is your business, up to a point. And it's probably true that if a film group discussed a film suggested by one member,

several other members might well buy the DVD, either to view it beforehand, or because they enjoyed it so much, they wanted to own it. But where BFFS might come in, it seems to me, would be to provide what the book group movement never needed, coming from the grass roots as it did: a head of steam, a sense of legitimacy. No-one ever says 'a book group! What's that when it's at home, then?'. Soon, no-one will question the idea of film groups either.

So as of now, film groups are on BFFS's agenda. We're looking to assist their formation in any way possible, to identify problems in order to find solutions, and to recognise good practice. We can already see that one useful role for us would be in the process of getting acceptance of the idea among distributors, either generally, or on a film-by-film basis. Another might be to recognise innovation in film group practice in the FSoY awards. NewsReel will be interested in printing accounts of setting one up, the problems, the joys and successes. And we will be setting up a film group forum on the BFFS website at [www.bffs.org.uk](http://www.bffs.org.uk)

## RESEARCH INTO FILM SOCIETIES

**RICHARD MACDONALD ASKS FOR YOUR HELP - AND BFFS SUGGESTS THAT YOU MIGHT KNOW SOMEONE WHO USED TO BE ACTIVE IN FILM SOCIETIES, WHO MIGHT VERY WELL HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO TELL HIM.**

Were you actively involved in a film society between 1945 and 1975? What are your memories and recollections of being involved in film society activity during this period? I am a researcher looking at the post-war history of the film society movement for a PhD thesis at Goldsmiths, University of London. My research aims to understand the film society movement in part through the stories, opinions and experiences of the many individuals who have been involved in film society activity. For me, the success of the project depends on gaining a vivid insight into the wide variety of experience of volunteers and members within societies of all types, sizes and locations. I also want to hear from people involved at all levels of the movement, from the local society to the national federation. However and wherever you were involved in film societies between these years, if you would like to share and record your memories for this oral history project, I would love to hear from you.

There is currently a renewal of interest in the rich history of artistic and cultural cinema in Britain. Film societies are a unique and important part of this history. Any effort to tell a story about the past is also in part an attempt to address the present. As a project tracing the changing role and influence of film societies whilst documenting the memories of film society volunteers, I hope that this research will speak to those involved in film societies in the present as well as inform those outside the movement who may be unfamiliar with its history.

If you would like to take part in this project and share your experiences of film societies or if you would like to hear more please call me, Richard MacDonald on the Freephone number 0845 223 5309, email me at [r.macdonald@gold.ac.uk](mailto:r.macdonald@gold.ac.uk) or write to me c/o Media and Communications Department, Goldsmiths, University of London, Lewisham Way, New Cross. London SE14 6NW.

## SOUTH WEST CELEBRATION

The South West Group has just released its annual listing of Film Society programmes revealing that, in this 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, do-it-yourself cinema is especially live and well in its region. When *FILM SOUTH WEST* was first published in 1988, only 18 Societies were listed. Most of those are still operating very successfully today, including Cheltenham celebrating 60 years of screening films this year, but they have been joined by an explosion of new venues, many making use of the new digital technology. In the past twelve months alone, seven new Societies and Clubs have been set up bringing the total listed in this year's brochure to sixty. There has also been a rapid expansion of touring cinema schemes in the region including Beaford Moving Pictures in North Devon and Moviola covering Dorset and neighbouring counties.

Over the next nine months, these venues are organising around 900 screenings of over 200 different titles ranging from recent Oscar winners such as *Sideways* and *Vera Drake* to classics like *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* and Fellini's *La Strada*. The first two titles are being distributed as part of the Group's block-booking scheme, along with eight other new releases on DVD including *The Story of the Weeping Camel* and *Downfall*, the acclaimed account of Hitler's last days that topped the poll at Birmingham. Further details and copies of FSW18 are available from Brian Clay by ringing 0117 9420378.

## SOCIETIES THAT ARE STRAPPED FOR CASH LOOK TO FUNDRAISING AS A WAY FORWARD

Increasing numbers of Film Societies are finding that what they take at the box office doesn't cover all eventualities, and they find themselves in the same boat as groups that are starting a society from scratch. NewsReel will in the months to come look at the issue of fundraising for film societies, starting in this issue with the National Lotteries Awards for All scheme

### AWARDS FOR ALL – HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION

*Mary Salisbury, of Ventnor Film Society, recently made a successful application to the Awards for All scheme, netting a cool £5,000 and making sure her society's start-up was successful*

Awards for All is a Lottery grants scheme aimed at local communities. Grants of between £500 and £5000 are awarded to projects that enable people to take part in a variety of community activities as well as promoting, among other things, education and the health of the local community. Film screenings by local film societies clearly fit these criteria, contributing as they do to the cultural and social life of communities otherwise deprived of stimulating, 'arthouse' films. The website at [www.awardsforall.org.uk/](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk/) is very helpful, taking you through the application process in a straightforward way.

Completing the application form is easy but care needs to be taken to hit all the right social signifiers. The more that access to disadvantaged groups can be demonstrated, the

more likely it is that your application will succeed. Therefore, if you include senior citizens, those on benefits, the disabled, the young, women, ethnic minorities, or any combination of these groups, or if you live in an isolated community, so much the better. Question 10 on the application form provides the key aims that need to be met. Your society should show that it aims to 'extend access and participation', 'increase skill and creativity', and 'improve the quality of life'.

Your application also needs to describe how your society will go about achieving these ends. The more precise you can be in explaining the society's activities, what equipment is needed and how you intend to increase access and participation the better. If members can volunteer to take part in committee work, managing the equipment, running the accounts, booking films, and if membership is encouraged from the commu-

nity, then you will be able to create a strong application.

You will need a bank account and be able to show income and expenditure over the previous year. If you are a new society then you must have a bank account and provide a simple one year financial projection. If you intend to buy equipment such as a projector with the money, attach an estimate from a suitable supplier. You will also need to provide the name of an independent referee; the range of possibilities is wide, (we used our local bank manager).

The application pack is available from [www.awardsforall.org.uk](http://www.awardsforall.org.uk) (alternatively phone 0845 600 20 40) and it includes a very useful booklet giving helpful advice to applicants. The process is very straightforward and our regional Awards for All office was extremely helpful on the few occasions that we needed to speak to them.

**Awards for All England** Tel: 0845 600 20 40 Links Contacts

Welcome About News Awards Who can apply Activities How to apply

**Welcome to Awards for All in England**

What is Awards for All?

Awards for All is a Lottery grants scheme aimed at local communities. We award grants of between £500 and £5,000 in a simple and straightforward way.

How can we help your organisation and community?

We can fund projects that enable people to take part in art, sport, heritage and community activities, as well as projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community.

You can apply at any time

- The application form is short and simple
- There are links to guidance notes and sources of help
- You will be told if you are successful or not within 8 weeks

If you are planning a project and you need between £500 and £5,000 then Awards for All may be able to help you. Sometimes quite small sums of money can have a big impact. We hope those awards will make a real difference to communities.

[Click here to download our logo](#)

**micro GRANTS**

Awards for All is a national programme operating through nine regional offices in England. We welcome applications from all sectors of the community and all parts of the country. Each region has some areas of special emphasis it wishes to focus on. Details are on your regional site.

To be taken to your regional web site click on the text links below:

- North East - North West - Yorkshire and the Humber - East Midlands - West Midlands - Eastern - London - South West - South East

### GOLDEN RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL AWARDS FOR ALL APPLICATIONS

(by a professional fundraiser we know)

- 1) Awards for All funding aims to extend access and participation; increase skill and creativity; and improve quality of life. Make sure your project fulfils one or more of these aims and make sure you show clearly in your application how your project does this.
- 2) Make sure you read the regional focus for your area, and if you meet any of their focus criteria, make that clear in your application.
- 3) Make sure you include all additional information they require (for example, constitution, accounts etc). Otherwise your application will be returned unassessed.
- 4) Write clearly in simple language using short sentences.
- 5) Include a very specific budget - do not be vague. Make sure you include 2 quotes for items within your budget where appropriate.

Also, don't forget to make sure your bank account has two signatories (or they will return the application), and that the independent referee you use for the application is on the list of approved people (same reason).

## JONATHAN BALCON

Jonathan Balcon, son of Sir Michael Balcon of Ealing Studios fame, is available for talks to film societies about his father's career - Michael Balcon gave Hitchcock his first directing job. Jonathan himself had a career at Lloyds of London insuring film productions and independent television contractors, and he talks from extensive knowledge about his father's work from 1919 to 1960. Jonathan's fees for film societies are negotiable. He may be contacted by email through [jennie@thepeakersagency.com](mailto:jennie@thepeakersagency.com).

## EX-CEO'S MESSAGE

*In 2004 BFFS had to part company with its CEO, David Phillips, who asked us to convey this message to BFFS members.*

The film society movement delivers an invaluable service providing access to highest quality cinema right across the UK. It is a movement that is very close to my heart.

It has been an interesting 5 years and I leave you in the firm hope that your difficulties with the UKFC prove successful.

I have made many friends, and I wish you all the best for the future.

*David Phillips, former CEO*

## NEWSREEL

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](mailto:bffs-admin@sihe.ac.uk). Correspondence about the contents of NewsReel is welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the above address.

## FANTASTIC OFFER TO BFFS MEMBERS

BFFS has negotiated a great deal for film societies with premier AV suppliers Ivojo Multimedia (yup, that's their ad just below). The DLP projector of choice for most film societies has got to be the Projectiondesign Cineo 1 MkII, which combines affordability with excellent image quality and reliability.

The Cineo 1 MkII is listed at just a shade under £5,500 (including VAT), but to film societies which are fully paid-up members of the Federation, Ivojo will charge only £5,000. At the time of writing, that's the maximum amount you can tender for under the Awards for All scheme (see our report elsewhere in NewsReel). Two plus two, anyone...

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