

## **NEWSLETTER NO. 38 FEBRUARY 2017**



### **All Aboard the Mystery Tour of the Chapman Cinema Land!**

For our last Members' event in 2016 Australian Cinema Buffs Andrew Pike and President Ray conducted a coach load of Friends around the streets of Chapman – named after the greats of Australian film and entertainment. Film clips, knowledgeable commentary, funny facts and even morning tea were a feature of this terrific morning!

*Below: on and off the coach on our Magical Filmic Tour*



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**Important News – see attachments to this Newsletter; President Rays' Annual Report and a Letter to the Minister of the Arts regarding the future of the NFSA, plus article from The Australian.**

**FRIENDS! :** Don't forget that every Sunday afternoon you can settle in for an discounted afternoon of cinematic delights. With an emphasis on the NFSA's collection of 35mm and 16mm treasures, you can enjoy a very special selection of rare, cult, classic, experimental and otherwise neglected treasures of international cinema.



## Lost Horizons : Frank Capra's America.

To celebrate the NFSA restoration of the lost Capra film, *Three Days to Live* we spend February with the godfather of screwball comedy. Join us for a month of Hollywood charm, wit and grace, in the glow of 'Capra's touch'

Sun. Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 2pm *Three Days to Live*/ 4.30 pm *Lost Horizon*  
 Sun Feb 12<sup>th</sup> 2pm *It Happened One Night*/ 4pm *American Madness*  
 Sun Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2pm *The Miracle Woman*/4pm *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*  
 Sun 26<sup>th</sup> Feb *Prelude to War* /3.15pm *It's a Wonderful Life* (1 ticket-2 films!)

### TO OBTAIN YOUR DISCOUNT:

\* Online Ticket Purchase: Go to the TryBooking link - <https://trybooking.com/LAEF> - and select the number of full-priced adult tickets you wish to purchase. Proceed to the payment page where you'll find a DISCOUNT CODE/SPECIAL OFFERS field at the bottom of the page. Enter NFSAFRIENDS in this field and hit APPLY. 50% will then be deducted from full-priced adult ticket(s) ordered and a price of \$7 per ticket will be shown. (NOTE: This will not work if you order Concession Tickets)  
 Over the Counter: Present your FRIENDS membership card when purchasing your ticket on the Sunday afternoon to receive tickets for \$7.

**Next great Friends event: If you enjoyed 'Cinematic Chapman' you're going to love 'Musical Moncrieff' - David Kilby takes us on another mystery tour through the surprising streets of a Canberra suburb! COMING SOON!**

**CALLING FOR VOLUNTEERS:** We are looking for people to join our friendly volunteer crew at the NFSA. If you like indexing, or working with databases, or reading film journals, this might be for you as our job is to index film journal articles for an international database. Training will be provided!  
 WHEN: Wednesdays, 2.30-4.30pm (you can offer weekly, fortnightly, monthly, ad hoc, as suits your schedule)

WHERE: NFSA Library. If you would like to take part or would like to find out more first, please email Sue Terry at [archivefriends@gmail.com](mailto:archivefriends@gmail.com)



**Like to keep in touch a new way?**



Find the Friends on Facebook!

**[www.facebook.com/NFSAFriends](http://www.facebook.com/NFSAFriends)**

Sign up to the NFSA's online newsletter to receive advance notification of NFSA events!

[http://ww](http://www)

Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield

It's worth regularly checking the Friends' website and Facebook page to keep up with what's happening. These will soon be complemented by a new Friends' membership brochure, and a leaflet setting out a potted history of the NFSA

#### **The 2017 Friends of the NFSA Committee:**

President: Ray Edmondson; Vice President: Chris Harrison; Secretary: Sue Terry; Treasurer: Chris Emery; Committee: David Kilby, Lindy Ross, Lynne Grehg; Public Officer: Sue Terry, Newsletter Editor: Lindy Ross

Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive Inc\*

PO Box 9618 Deakin ACT 2600.

E: [archivefriends@gmail.com](mailto:archivefriends@gmail.com) Website: [www.archivefriends.org.au](http://www.archivefriends.org.au)

Minister for the Arts  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

With the appointment of a new CEO for the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) now imminent, it is timely for me to put before you our concerns about public access to the institution and its collections.

Under its Act the NFSA is required to provide preserve, maintain, promote and provide access to the national collection, along with some related responsibilities. It is a maxim of the audiovisual archiving profession that preservation without access is pointless: the two functions must be in balance.

The steady reductions in the NFSA's budget over recent years have had a devastating effect on the NFSA's public services and its physical accessibility. In a sequence of cuts it has lost its signature public screenings program and touring festival; its opening hours have been reduced; its public exhibition has been closed; its shop and library have closed; its cafe closed, reopened and just recently closed again; the creation of retail products has stopped, started and stopped again. While some public screenings and special events have been restored, they lack the predictable forward scheduling that allows audience loyalty to be rebuilt. Together, these activities form a significant critical mass.

These closures have been compounded by the fact that the NFSA has become the only national memory institution where short term parking is unavailable. The NFSA now markets its parking spaces to all-day stayers, making normal visitation by members of the public impractical.

Like other national memory institutions the NFSA has been increasing its on-line presence. This complements physical public access activities, but it is not a substitute for them. The NFSA's shrinking visibility has become a vicious circle, and in turn it imperils the ability of the institution to attract the sponsorship support that it desperately needs. No one is going to fund an invisible institution.

The Friends of the NFSA is an independent association, established in 2000, dedicated to supporting and advocating for the institution and increasing its visibility. The passage of the NFSA Act in 2008 was due, in part, to its efforts. It expresses this support today by being a focus for the NFSA's constituency: offering volunteers to complement staff activity, and organising public events which present and interpret the national collection.

The Friends accepts that we live in tough times and that public money must be spent carefully. We believe it is crucial to take a medium term strategic view: to re-balance the NFSA's priorities so that it presents a vibrant public face and rebuilds its visibility and accessibility. Among other things the NFSA possesses one of Canberra's iconic heritage buildings – a tourist attraction in its own right – as well as what may well be the nation's finest state-of-the-art cinema. It has a knowledgeable constituency who are happy to volunteer their time and skills to assist it.

May we therefore make the following suggestions:

- A rebuilding of the NFSA public face with a new standing exhibition, a re-opened library, and the reinstatement of suitable short term parking. There are many possible solutions here: they are not necessarily expensive, and it has been demonstrated that volunteer labour is readily available.
- The reintroduction of a stable program of product creation and marketing, making items from the collection more widely available
- A stable, curated screening program in the NFSA's Arc cinema, possibly using a public/private partnership to contain costs and increase publicity. The reinstatement of travelling screenings, building on this model, can run in tandem with the Arc's program.
- With the involvement of the Friends, a growing program of regular volunteer-led public events on NFSA premises, utilising successful models the Friends have already developed.

In what is presumably another consequence of forced economies, the NFSA Board has for years been kept at its minimum permitted strength of five members. It needs to operate at its full strength of nine members if the Board is to effectively oversee the full scope of the NFSA's professional disciplines as well as represent and harvest the support of the NFSA's constituency and its diverse stakeholders.

The immediate task of the Board and the incoming CEO is to build the internal morale of remaining NFSA staff, give them hope for the future and turn their vision outward instead of inward. We are heartened by the recent partial restoration of the National Library's budget and would like to see similar relief offered to the NFSA.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Edmondson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Ray Edmondson OAM  
President, Friends of the NFSA  
NFSA Curator Emeritus



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO AGM 2016

The role of the Friends, as a visible part of the NFSA's constituency, is to act as a public advocate and support the NFSA in fulfilling its mandate, to increase public awareness and to offer a membership program. This year the Friends have worked on developing its ongoing program of events and member benefits.

**Advocacy** The Friends are concerned about the cumulative effects of the Government's continuing, so-called "efficiency dividend" budget cuts on the NFSA (and other memory institutions), which have had increasingly drastic effects on activities and services. It has drawn attention to this in letters to the press and has encouraged others to add their voices.

**Volunteer activities** have continued, with the staffing of the NFSA Library. Open to the public, the hours are limited to Wednesday afternoons. Volunteers have taken over the task of preparing the NFSA's ongoing contribution to FIAF's *International Index for Film Periodicals* but we have yet to achieve an arrangement whereby the Friends can offer a fully-fledged library service.

Regular **Sunday afternoon screenings** were commenced by NFSA in June as a regular fixture in coordination with the Friends, who have had input into the program and sometimes introduce the films. Friends operate a greeting table in the lobby in advance of each screening. This has been an avenue for publicising the Friends and recruiting members. Friends members gain a 50% discount on the admission price for screenings.

The **Argonauts page** on the Friends website has continued to quietly gather reminiscences from former members of this highly influential children's club on ABC radio. To date, 405 Argonauts have added their memories to the page, which makes a distinctive addition to the NFSA's collection, since so little remains of the original radio broadcasts. The Argonauts signature song (which can be heard on the website) features on the NFSA *Sounds of Australia* register.

**Profile** Four issues of the Friends *Newsletter* were distributed to members. The Friends' facebook page, established 3 years ago ([www.facebook.com/NFSAFriends](http://www.facebook.com/NFSAFriends)) to complement the Friends website ([www.archivefriends.org.au](http://www.archivefriends.org.au)) has continued to publicise both Friends and NFSA activities. A hotlink on the NFSA website also points to the Friends' website. While events have received good local publicity on ABC radio, we have yet to succeed in attracting attention from other Canberra media.

**Events** *Friday with Friends* continued in the 100-seat theatrette, though with a reduced frequency, as the NFSA developed its own events to fill the after-work-Friday timeslot. These presentations were complemented by other fixtures. The calendar for the year:

*November 2015:* Newsreel veteran Richard Keys related his experience as a cameraman in giving an overview of some of the great moments in Australia's newsreel history

*February 2016:* Film icon Helen Morse, in conversation with Andrew Pike, gave us the inside story of her career, illustrated with clips from some of her best known film and television roles. In the same month, the Friends joined with NFSA to present Adelaide film historian David Donaldson's appreciation of "Hollywood's First Australian" – producer/ director/ actor J. P. McGowan.

*May 2016:* Former NFSA staffer and historian Marilyn Dooley offered us “Gumleaf Girls” – an insight into women in early Australian films, and especially into the career of Lottie Lyell. Lottie’s earliest surviving film – *The Romantic Story of Margaret Catchpole* (1911) – was shown and analysed in its entirety.

*August 2016:* In cooperation with the NFSA, a daytime session on “Caring for your collection” was offered.

*September 2016:* David Kilby’s entertaining presentation *Our home is girt* offered some startling insights into life in yesteryear’s Canberra, and especially its local sound recording history, revealing some forgotten songs celebrating the national capital. Also this month, in conjunction with the Reel McCoy film group, Friends were offered a Sunday afternoon program of classic film comedy shorts.

On the horizon for December 2016, a bus tour of “Cinematic Chapman” – Canberra’s unique suburb where all the streets are named after film personalities.

**New Patron** In April, Ms Patricia Amphlett OAM accepted an invitation to become a patron of the Friends. Under the stage name Little Pattie, Patricia was one of Australia’s best known singing stars of the 1960s and 1970s. Later she served as the National President of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and as Vice President of Actor’s Equity. Her connections with the nation’s memory institutions include terms on the Council of the Australian War Memorial and the Board of the NFSA. Patricia joins the Friends’ other patrons: Alan Rydge, Anthony Buckley AM, Bryan Brown AM, Fred Schepisi AO, Andrew Pike OAM, Chris Noonan, Gil Brealy AO.

**Relations with NFSA** As Friends activities have grown, relations with NFSA and its staff have become more multi-faceted. Reduced availability of the theatrette, and the NFSA’s policy of marketing its parking spaces for full day use to maximise revenue, has made it impractical to launching a series of daytime events at the NFSA building. Accordingly the committee exploring other potential venues near the city centre. We record our thanks to David Hogan and Jean Waghorn, who in turn served as NFSA management’s liaison officer. We wish David well in his retirement.

**Membership** remains small compared to Friends organisations of other national memory institutions, but the rate of new memberships has doubled when compared to last year.

I would like to thank the members of our very hard working voluntary committee, which has carried forward the activities of the Association over the last year. The Committee met approximately monthly, with much email contact between meetings. I would like to particularly thank Michael Pejovic who has served energetically on the Committee for 3 years and is stepping down at this point. I’d also like to thank NFSA CEO Michael Loebenstein and other staff members who have supported Friends activities.

Ray Edmondson, President  
21 November 2016

# National Film and Sound Archive faces uncertain future

Sue Milliken and Anthony Buckley at the neglected National Film and Sound Archive. Picture: James Croucher

MATTHEW WESTWOOD THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM January 17, 2017

A visit to the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra is a dispiriting experience. The building on McCoy Circuit looks promising enough: a 1930 sandstone edifice whose art deco style could be a reminder of a glamorous age of filmmaking.

The disappointment starts inside because there is really nothing to see. A gallery that used to have displays of film memorabilia is closed. So is the bookshop. A television in the front room is showing an old documentary about Australian broadcasting — hosted by Bill Hunter, who died in 2011 — and one of the theatres is screening vintage newsreels. There's a cafe and a courtyard, but that's about it.

On a recent Friday afternoon I chatted to one of the few other patrons wandering the lonely halls and he was as despondent about the experience as me.

Bob Hawke opened the NFSA in 1984, in what was originally the Australian Institute of Anatomy. These days it is the custodian of more than two million pieces of audiovisual history, including the world's oldest feature narrative film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, made in 1906. But because of several years of budget cuts, the NFSA's public programs have been severely curtailed. The gallery and bookshop were closed and the year-long film program at the Arc Cinema was cut back.

The diminished state of the NFSA has not impressed filmmakers Anthony Buckley and Sue Milliken, who fear there is no long-term vision for the institution. Their Industry Activity Group has been quietly campaigning for a new, purpose-built NFSA that would be an archive, a conservation and research facility, and an exciting museum that people want to visit.

“The archive is not a second-hand record shop, it's far more important,” says Buckley, an editor and producer whose credits include 1971's *Wake in Fright*. “It hasn't been given the attention that is warranted, and I think (the NFSA) feels very deprived that they can't do the things they are asked to do.



“It’s important for our younger generations to know what a radio looked like, what it sounded like. To sit on the chair of a big Mitchell camera, so you can see how pictures were made.”

The NFSA recently farewelled its chief executive, Michael Loebenstein, who is returning to Vienna to head the Austrian Film Museum. He says audiovisual archives such as the NFSA historically have struggled for arts funding, here and elsewhere, because the material is often perceived to be commercial or disposable.

“Performing arts, literature and visual arts still rank high in the imagination of decision-makers ... and film and recorded sound and broadcast often fall between the cracks,” he says. “There is a lack of acknowledgment that our achievements in film are up there with our achievements in literature and painting, for instance.”



When Loebenstein arrived at the NFSA in 2011, its federal funding was \$24.6 million. It increased to \$27m in 2014 but cuts each year since have brought funding back to \$24.3m this year. Expenditure last year was \$32m. As a result of cuts more than 50 people have lost their jobs and in 2014 Loebenstein made the “painful” decision to close the NFSA’s exhibition hall.

“It was disproportionately expensive to run it for a fairly small audience,” he says. “It is a beautiful heritage building, but it has never been fit for purpose as an audiovisual archive. We couldn’t host any significant touring exhibitions because of climate control, security, floor loading for visitors. It would need a significant amount of money to be invested.”

He instead gave priority to the urgent task of conserving historic material on rapidly decaying media, such as film and magnetic tape. In the past year, the archive has digitally remastered feature films including *Storm Boy*, *Proof* and *The Odd Angry Shot*, the latter produced by Milliken.

The Cinesound Movietone Australian Newsreel Collection, a Bicentenary

gift to the nation from businessmen Rupert Murdoch (executive chairman of News Corp, publisher of *The Australian*) and Alan Rydge, has been transferred to safety film but has not yet been digitised. Loebenstein would like to see the collection made available online for free.

Loebenstein says the NFSA is a national collection and should be available to all. But, given the financial restraints, he believes digital access via online collections is more important than building a new museum. He points out that the NFSA has separate offsite storage in Canberra for its collection that was revalued last year at \$249m. It would be expensive to move. A new building could cost upwards of \$80m, he says, citing the National Portrait Gallery that opened in 2008 at a cost of \$88m.

“Some stakeholders wish there were a custom-built facility that is more like a museum of film and television,” Loebenstein says. “That’s really hard to argue in the current fiscal environment.”

The NFSA has a collection of material culture to do with film, broadcasting and sound recordings — such as historic cameras, film props and ephemera — but Loebenstein says these objects can be displayed in other institutions. The NFSA has renewed its partnership with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne and this year will present, with the NPG, an exhibition called *Starstuck: Portraits from the Movies*. Many of the exhibits will be drawn from the NFSA collection but will go on display at the NPG before a regional tour.

It may be a cost-effective solution but not a satisfactory one for Milliken and Buckley, who say the national collection is too important to lie hidden away in a little-visited building. Their vision for a new facility includes conservation labs, research facilities and public theatres and galleries. Their preference is for a venue in Sydney, named a UNESCO City of Film in 2010, but still without cinematheque or a dedicated film centre.

Separate discussions about opening a Sydney film centre have been going on for years. Buckley has identified the former White Bay Power Station in the city’s inner west as an ideal site: turning a former coal-burning industry into a centre for the creative industries of screen and sound.

The power station has been flagged for redevelopment as a technology hub and a spokesman for NSW Arts Minister Troy Grant says the government

will also consider cultural uses for the site. Any moves the NFSA may make, though, are the responsibility of the federal government.

Milliken and Buckley are encouraged by discussions with the NFSA board led by chairwoman Gabrielle Trainor. The board soon will appoint a successor to Loebenstein, and Milliken and Buckley believe the next chief executive should be an Australian with local industry experience.

In the meantime, the sorry state of the NFSA demands attention. It is sad testimony to the impact of funding cuts to our national collecting institutions, and does little to honour Australia's pioneering achievements in film, sound and broadcasting. Milliken's frustration is palpable when she describes the "bipartisan neglect" that has beset the NFSA.

"The big thrust is to get it out of that building and into purpose-built accommodation," she says. "The National Library and the National Gallery have purpose-built buildings ... but the art form of the 20th century, the most pervasive art form of the modern day, is being left in this small antiquated building in Canberra and is not treated in the same way."

@matthewwestwood