

Tony Buckley's Address to Friends of the Archive AGM December 9, 2013

Thank you for the invitation : however, I thought I was going to address just the members of the Friends of the Archive, at their AGM, which concluded only a few minutes ago. I wasn't expecting to be addressing a full house. I won't be deterred, because what I have to say I hope will concern you all, and in particular the Board and CEO of the National Film and Sound Archive.

We have seen the disastrous results of the Archive's management, or should that be mismanagement, by the Australian Film Commission. But there are still issues that concern not only me but most members of our industry and that I want to address publicly for action to be taken. I am finding considerable disquiet in both Sydney and Melbourne as to why the collection is so difficult to access, film-makers are phoning me with grave reservations about depositing their collections. I was asked the other day by a respected leader in the film business, "Why appoint a CEO who is a cultural entrepreneur and has a vision for the place, when the organisation is strangled by what appears to be an inflexible bureaucracy?" Good question. But it goes a lot deeper. There is no point in having a diligent workforce of conservators, curators, if there is no public access to the results of their work.

I can go to the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Gallery here in Canberra, the Art Gallery of NSW, and buy a print of Turner, Monet, Streeton, Condon, Jeffrey Smart, Whitely. I can go to the MCA and get a Warhol. But I walk into this place and can't buy a DVD of *The Overlanders*, *Smithy*, *Oyster Farmer*, *Sons of Matthew*, *The Sundowners*, *Sunstruck*, *Dad & Dave Come to Town* or *Orphan of the Wilderness*. No, one can't. I can go into JB Hi Fi at the moment and buy the Warner Bros 50 film collection for \$345. I can go into the BFI Southbank and order most British films since the silent days. There used to be a good range of product here before the Australian Film Commission dismantled it all. The product should be brought back and every feature made here be available.

The bureaucracy will claim it is a copyright problem. Copyright is not a problem, it is an issue, solvable by any good entertainment lawyer. And in any case, it is not a problem or issue for the retailer. Sound recordings are in the same boat.

I personally was responsible for the depositing of 17 Cinesound feature films in 1964. Only two have been restored and this was recently – *On Our Selection* and *Thoroughbred*. Why has it taken so long?

This is where the Friends of the Archive and its patrons have a role to play. You are not the Canberra Film Social Club – you have a bigger role to involve yourselves with.

The Last Film Search in fact should have been called the First Film Search, for there are still titles to be found. This place should hold a copy of every film made in Australia or about Australia. There should be a roving curator searching the vaults of the world for our missing films.

I am currently researching a documentary about a particular forgotten picture show in Sydney. The Seaborn Foundation at Rosebery holds the Denis Wolanski collection which includes an amazing collection of the amusement columns of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1904 to 1939, and from then on, the *SMH*. The problem with

research is that there are too many distractions. One of them concerns a Longford Lyell lost classic. Well, is it lost? The classifieds reveal that *Ginger Mick*, the sequel to *The Sentimental Bloke*, received laudatory reviews, most reviewers saying that it was better than *The Bloke*, and played in the city and right across the suburbs of Sydney in 1920 with huge box office takings. Then I later discover that it has opened in the West End of London to top business and glowing reviews. Is *Ginger Mick* still sitting somewhere in the vaults of a British Archive? Has anyone ever looked?

Then a surprise from the *SMH*, June 12 1943:

CHARLES LAUGHTON SCARED

Nervous of Anzac role

The article reveals details of *The Man From Down Under* and Laughton's fears of the Aussie accent. I had never heard of the film, though its pedigree is impressive. Co-starring Donna Reed and directed by Robert Z. Leonard for MGM. The internet reveals not good reviews, and Halliwells says "Appallingly indulgent sentimental star vehicle, a mistake for all concerned," but I find the one-sheeter on E-bay for \$38 and a lobby card for \$29. At the moment they grace the walls of my home but will probably soon find their way here in my next load of Archive boxes. I can't find anyone here in Australia who remembers the film, but fortuitously Ray Edmondson is visiting Rochester. He finds a 16mm print in George Eastman House. Whether it's good or bad is immaterial. A copy should reside here.

I won't go on, for I know you are waiting to be entertained – but I think the Australian film, television, radio and audio-visual industries deserve to know what the vision is for this place to achieve for 2020, 2025.

Money of course is needed and I suggest a foundation funded by the industry itself be established to support the ambitions of the NFSA. Paul J. Getty gave an initial bequest of £25 million to the BFI many years ago and his Trust continues to support the preservation of British film.

What can our industry do to support the NFSA? If a missing 20 minutes of *Metropolis* can be found in an obscure South American archive, what Australian treasures are out there? Let the Second Film Search begin.

Now on with the show.