

# GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY OF MARKET HARBOROUGH MOVIE MAKERS

By Peter Wilford



In October 1959 a group of cine film enthusiasts met in the Old Grammar School and decided to form a Cine Society in the town with aims to widen interest in home-movie making. It was agreed that the new society should amalgamate temporarily with the Photographic Society.

The first film to be made as a joint project by the group was of a local Tug-o-War competition, held on Saturday 2nd April 1960, and staged to promote the film 'Two-Way Stretch' which was being screened at the Ritz cinema the following week. The 8mm film, shot by the members, was edited and shown during the intervals of the evening performances at the cinema. A 'home movie' projector was set up at the front of the balcony, which threw a picture of about 20 feet (6 metres) wide on the screen. The Society's minute book records: 'With a throw of 80 feet, the clarity of the picture had to be seen to be believed and the film received considerable applause from the audience at each of the four showings.'



COMPILING THE SOUNDTRACK FOR A FILM IN 1968 USING A RECORD TURNTABLE, HOME MADE SOUND MIXER, AND REEL-TO-REEL TAPE RECORDERS. LEFT TO RIGHT: PETER WILFORD, MATTHEW OLIVER, ROY RIPPIN, NIGEL PICKERING (STANDING)

At a meeting held on 24th May 1960, the cine section of the Photographic Society resolved to form an independent society, and so, Market Harborough Cine Society was established 50 years ago, later to become Market Harborough Movie Makers.

Only four days after that meeting, the Society filmed the 'Old Time Market' and the ox roast in the Cattle Market, which were held to raise money for the World Refugee Year Fund. The event was opened by the Duchess of Rutland and many local dignitaries appeared on the stage erected in The Square. This film, like all made by the Society at that time, was shot on Standard 8mm colour film. This was purchased as 25 feet of double perforated 16mm film which ran for two minutes on the first side, and then reversed in the camera for another two minutes running time. It was sent away for processing, where it was split down the centre and joined end for end, to produce four minutes of 8mm film. The film was 'silent'; sound could not be recorded onto it at the time it was shot! The Society,

like other film making enthusiasts, often used a tape recorder to record sound effects on location, and then added a commentary, to produce an acceptable 'sound' film, subject to the tape recorder being capable of rough synchronisation with the film. Later, it was possible to record sound onto a magnetic stripe bonded to the edge of the film. Now, with video camcorders, that difficulty no longer exists; the pictures and sound are recorded in perfect synchronisation at the same time.

For the four years from 1963, the Society filmed the town's Carnival which involved the deployment of many members at strategic points along the route, and in the show ground. It also gave the opportunity to add realistic sound of the marching bands, and the buzz of excitement from the children taking part.

The Society made three silent films for the Urban Council, including two recording the award of the Citizenship Cup. The first, in 1963, covered the award to the boxing champion, George Aldridge, and then, in 1965 to the Market Harborough Division of St. John Ambulance. The other recorded the official opening of the Church Street Improvement Scheme in April 1963.

By 1966 the membership had grown to over 40 and it was felt that the Society should endeavour to find premises for its exclusive use. The old Settling Rooms, above the licensed bars in the middle of the Cattle Market were vacant, and had not been occupied for many years. The rooms had no electricity or toilet facilities, and heating was by two open fireplaces. Plaster was falling off the walls and total redecoration was necessary. An application was made to the Urban Council for a tenancy of the rooms, and an initial low rent was agreed because the Society undertook to carry out all the necessary work to make the premises 'usable.' Fortunately, many members were skilled in various trades and all the electrical, plumbing, carpentry, plastering, and decorating work was carried out without incurring any labour costs. Overhead electric heating, a fixed projection screen, and soundproof recording facilities were installed, and simple film sets could be built in the space available. The new headquarters of the Society were officially opened by the Chairman of the Council on 6th September 1966.

Councillor Eric White, the Chairman of the Urban Council doing the introductions with Peter Wilford filming from a vantage point on the railway embankment. (cutting from the Harborough Mail)

In 1967 a rare opportunity came to film a royal visit to the Town. On the 12th May, the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh travelled by car from Rutland to Harborough's railway station to board the royal train for Rugby. Following a request to the organisers of the visit, the Society was given formal permission to place three cameramen at vantage points on the station premises. It was understood that this was the first time an amateur film group had been granted special camera positions for a royal visit. The resultant film, which has been shown to many audiences since, was narrated by the then Chairman of the Urban Council, Eric White who, with other local officials and their wives, had been presented to the royal party on their arrival.

In the later 1960s, Super 8 film became available and new "Super 8" cameras were designed for it. The 50 feet of 8mm film was enclosed in a plastic cartridge and it was no longer necessary to open the camera and reverse the reel of film. The Society's first project to be shot on this new film was "Queen for a Day" which featured the Carnival Queen in 1969.

During the 1970s, annual Newsreels and Town Magazine films were produced to record events that occurred during the respective years. Most included short sequences of

the Carnival and the selection of the Carnival Queen, and the construction or demolition of various buildings in the town. The visits by the Duke of Edinburgh to Welland Park School in 1973 and by the Duke of Gloucester to the Cattle Market in 1975 were also covered. Severe weather conditions which caused flooding, wind damage and low water levels in the canal were included. Repairs to the Church steeple and the Old Grammar School, and the disastrous fire at Tungstone Batteries in January 1978 are worth a mention. Altogether,



CAPTION: EDITING 8MM FILM USING TWO VIEWER EDITING MACHINES IN 1968. BOB HARRIS (LEFT) AND GEOFF PALMER (RIGHT)

over 90 separate items were included in the nine films. At the same time, the Society produced documentaries on subjects such as the demolition of Symington's corset factory, the Town Band, the Urban Council's achievements from 1895, the closing of the Ritz cinema, and Saint Dionysius Church restoration.



THE CINE SOCIETY FILMING THE "ROYAL VISIT AT THE RAILWAY STATION" ON 12TH MAY 1967



Arthur Wilford and Roy Rippin in the Theatre Control Box, November 1974

At the projector stand L to R - Matt Oliver, Fred Burton, Peter Wilford, Bob Harris, Arthur Wilford (front), Eric Davison & Roy Rippin

By the mid to late 1980s, video camcorders were becoming popular for making home-movies, and Society members started to abandon “celluloid” film in favour of video tape. At the same time, membership had dropped to a level where it was not possible to maintain the headquarters in the cattle market. In 1984, monthly meetings were transferred to the Community Room in Naseby Square, and that venue remains to the present day.

Although many members were producing their ‘home movies’ on video by the late 1980s, it was not possible to show them to an audience on a large screen because video projectors at the time were very big, not very portable, and extremely expensive. A 22 inch television set was perhaps acceptable for showing videos at the Cine Society meetings, but it was obviously inadequate for an audience in a public hall. For that reason, the first two films produced in the 1990s were made on 8mm film which could still be projected onto a large

screen using a film projector. These were documentaries tracing the history of the old Swimming Baths in 1991, and the Covered Stall Market and Cattle Market before they closed down in 1992.

Because the Society did not have the means to show new films to an audience, no “local interest” video films were produced. In the meantime, in 1989, because the emphasis had moved from movie making on film to video tape, the Society changed its name to “Market Harborough Movie Makers”.

After a few years, smaller less expensive video projectors were coming onto the market, and the Movie Makers had hoped to gain a Lottery award to purchase of one. Some other movie making clubs had managed to obtain an award, but unfortunately Market Harborough Movie Makers’ bid was unsuccessful. However, in the year 2000, in recognition of the work done in producing and showing films relating to the town to local audiences, they received a substantial grant from the Market Harborough and Bowdens Charities towards the purchase of video projection equipment.

It was then, after a ‘void’ of eight years, that the production and showing of local films ‘took off’ again, starting with “Millennium Waterways Week” and “Harborough’s Millennium Celebrations”, and with over forty more films to-date. Probably, the most successful have been, “The Inns and Pubs of Harborough”, “The Battle of Naseby”, “Working at The Rubber”, “Tales of a Land Army Girl”, “The Harborough Band”, “The Hallaton Treasure”, and the seven “Arts Fresco” and “Harborough in Bloom” films. In 2005 the Club was honoured by being invited to film the Junior World Gliding Championships held at Husbands Bosworth. This was a prestigious event, last held in Great Britain forty years earlier.



World Junior Gliding Championships at Husbands Bosworth – August 2005

Market Harborough Movie Makers – Film crew

L to R – Standing : John Pendered : Jean Harvey : Ron Harvey : Mike Palmer  
In the glider : Bob Harris : Peter Wilford  
Seated : Colin Sullivan : Roy Rippin : Ralph Holderness : Len Holden : John Fieldsend

In the last ten years, the Movie Makers have shown their films to around sixty local organisations in addition to the showings given to other movie making clubs in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Warwickshire. Since their first public film show in the Harborough Theatre in 1964, it has been the venue for the club’s annual public show, with the exception of a period of twelve years from the late 1980s when video projection equipment was not available. In most years, there were performances on three consecutive nights, but in recent years the show has been staged for two nights, with almost full houses for each performance. At present, yearly audience figures for the club’s films total around a thousand, which strongly suggests that local people enjoy seeing films depicting local events and history, which cannot be seen on broadcast television.

The club is very conscious of the value of the films held in its library, and methods of satisfactory archiving them are frequently considered. The old cine films appear to have retained their image quality, although sound recorded on the magnetic stripe is beginning to suffer with age. Film projectors are mainly mechanical, with straightforward amplifiers for the sound, and can be maintained by enthusiasts, both amateur and professional. However, the archiving of video films presents much greater problems. Video tape is a magnetic medium, and will no doubt lose some of its quality over the years, although digital tape appears to be reliable at present. Home produced DVDs are known to suffer with many problems, even those made within the last year or two. The equipment used to play the videos also has to be considered. With the rapid advance in digital technology, will the machines, or the skilled electronic technicians to repair them, be around in the years to come? The advice given to preserve valuable video films is to keep copying them onto the latest storage device available.



FILMING THE INTERNATIONAL AWARD WINNING ‘TALES OF A LAND ARMY GIRL’ IN 2009

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PETER WILFORD, COLIN SULLIVAN, PAT FOX AND LEN HOLDEN

Market Harborough Movie Makers have another ‘problem.’ Most members are well past retirement age and the club seriously needs some younger dedicated members, who will not only continue to make films of local interest, but maintain the library in good condition, and be able to show the films to the many local organisations which request film shows each year. Should the worst happen, and the Movie Makers club is dissolved, it is written into their constitution that all their local films and audio recordings are to be given to The Harborough Museum Trust.