

The Newsletter
of the Association of
Motion Picture Sound

ISSUE 45 WINTER 2003

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Are all your
AMPS contact
details up to date?

www.amps.net



AMPS



*The New Editor, struggling to get to grips with the Newsletter,
realises the enormity of the task ahead, but pauses to wish*



**Compliments of the Season
to AMPS members,
their friends and families.
A prosperous New Year to all**

This Newsletter is edited by Keith Spencer-Allen and is published by the Association of Motion Picture Sound for distribution to all members. The Newsletter can be contacted by phone - 01732 740950; by fax - 01732 779168 or via the preferred method of email - editor@amps.net. AMPS can be contacted through Brian Flickin, The Admin Secretary, 28 Knox Street, London W11 1HS. Membership enquiries to Patrick Heigham, AMPS Membership Secretary, c/o 28 Knox Street, London W11 1HS.

- AMPS SUSTAINING MEMBERS -

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 We thank all the above companies for their continuing support of AMPS

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members who have joined AMPS in the last twelve months

NAME	MEMBERSHIP	MAIN GRADE
Michael ADELMAN	Retired	Retired (re-joined)
Tony COOK	Full	Boom Operator
Hugh GRAHAM	Full	Production Mixer
Howard HALSALL	Full	Sound Editor
Rikki HANSON	Supplementary	Sound Assistant
Kevin HOYLES	Supplementary	Sound Assistant
André JACQUEMIN	Full	Sound Supervisor
John MARCHBANK	Full	Production Mixer
Robin PENDER	Affiliate	Sound Training Supervisor
Andrew SISSONS	Full	Production Mixer
Mike TURNER	Full	Production Mixer
Brit WARNER	Full	Sound Editor (USA)
Scott WILKINSON	Full	Re-Recording Mixer
Jonathan WYATT	Full	Production Mixer
David ALLEN	Honorary Retired	awarded Honorary
John SALTER	Honorary Retired	awarded Honorary
Ken SOMERVILLE	Honorary Retired	awarded Honorary

No, we haven't stopped publishing the Newsletter....

I'd like to begin with a few apologies and an explanation. As you may know, for the last ten years this Newsletter was edited, assembled, stuffed in envelopes and posted by Bob Allen and myself - well in fact I had it relatively easy, just co-editing - I never had to lick a single stamp!

Earlier this year Bob announced that he was returning to his native New Zealand for good. When we realised that he was serious, I agreed to take over the running of the Newsletter but with some changes which were supported by AMPS Council.

Unfortunately sometimes earning a living gets in the way just when you need the most free time to apply to the matters in hand - and that I'm afraid was what happened. Unable, through time pressures, to implement our grand plans until next year, I returned to prepare this traditional Newsletter in our traditional way.

So please accept my apologies for the erratic nature of the Newsletter over 2003. We are still committed to a quarterly publication and the plans we will shortly be announcing will help ensure that it happens regularly and, as far as possible, without fail.

Preparing this Newsletter has given me an insight into the huge amount of preparation work that Bob undertook for each issue, something that you only understand when you have to do it all yourself.

▶▶ Bob was seen off in style by a large number of old and new colleagues, friends and family, meeting at Twickenham. There are some great pictures of the event but we holding that over till the next issue. We've heard from Bob in NZ and he's settling in well, and still contributing to the publication!

▶▶ As we endeavour to catch-up with events that have taken place since the last issue, not everything is being taken in chronological order. Articles and reports where photography is important have been held back for the next issue where our improved production process - all electronic - will make a better job of them.

▶▶ Hopefully you will have seen AMPS' new logo used increasingly over the past year. Introduced at the last AGM, it gives us a fresh face to present to the outside world, and more appropriate for the role that AMPS has in promoting the interests of the Association.

▶▶ There is still time to put your name, or that of a colleague forward for the Council elections. The papers have been distributed already. Give it some thought. The Council will always benefit from new faces with ideas. Make your mark!

▶▶ 2004 sees the 15th anniversary of the formation of AMPS. How time flies.

▶▶ A request from all organisers of AMPS events that require an RSVP. It seems that we are all very good at letting them know we are coming but not so good at telling them if we've changed our minds. This is particularly important when catering is being provided because it costs AMPS money for something that isn't used. It's also important to let them know you're not coming when the venue has limited seating. A recent AMPS meeting was heavily over subscribed and extra bookings being refused but on the day, the room was half empty. Unfortunately many people who wanted to go were told it was full and missed the opportunity to attend. With the means of electronic communication open to us, even a call a few hours before the event you're unable to attend might enable someone else to take up an unwanted place. Thanks for your co-operation.

▶▶ We'd like to welcome two new Sustaining Members to AMPS - Videosonics Cinemasound, and Zound. Both are London-based facilities and we will carry more about them in the near future. Videosonics is the better known at present, as their MD, Dennis Weinrich, is also Chairman of the APPS (Association of Post Production Studios), and an AMPS member in his own right.

▶▶ Don't forget the AMPS 2004 Annual General Meeting and Sustaining Members Show. Held as normal at Pinewood Studios, in the Green Room and Gatsby Suite within the min Admin building close to the restaurant. Make a note of the 8th February, 10.30am for coffee, tea and biscuits for an 11.00am start. We try to conclude the AGM, business permitting, promptly so that we can meet with our Sustaining Members and examine whatever equipment or services they've chosen to exhibit. If you've never attended, there are generally a dozen or so displays covering a variety of the disciplines found in AMPS. It is an excellent opportunity to ask questions of a wide range of companies in congenial surrounds. It's also a good way of these companies finding out what we really want from the equipment we use. It's two-way. And then there is always the AMPS buffet and the congenial company of your colleagues.

◀◀ And finally, Season's Greeting with Best Wishes for a Prosperous New Year to all AMPS members, colleagues, families and friends.

**AMPS
NEWS**

**AMPS
NEWS**

**AMPS
NEWS**

HEARING...

What do you regard as your most important sense? Most would say sight; some might say touch; others might list smell. Undeniably, all are necessary in everyday life.

Those of us who work in the audio industries could not continue if we lost our hearing. If we were blind, we could still record music & dialogue, although judging lip sync in post production might pose a problem! So, in our jobs, we need both.

But, suppose your hearing deteriorates - how many of you have had hearing tests and frequency response measurement of your ears?

I used to enjoy target rifle shooting, until one day at the ranges, a particular shot caused my ears to ring. I ignored it as, in the past, similar occurrences passed off within hours. This time, however, it did not, and I realised that it was probably tinnitus.

A visit to a hearing consultant confirmed this. When I informed him of the possible cause, he then tested my hearing using all the intermediate frequencies, normally skipped on a regular test.

This produced a graph, showing that I was deficient by 20dB at 6kHz for the left ear. He was able to tell me that I shot off my right shoulder (the left ear being therefore closer to the rifle breech).

I was able to continue my work as a documentary recordist, but I did wonder, had I been a music balancer, or re-recording mixer, working in stereo, then what I might be hearing, would not be the same as a producer or director sitting by me. I would be adjusting balance and equalisation to suit my own particular hearing parameters.

So how many of you have had hearing measurements carried out?

Do it! It might surprise you.

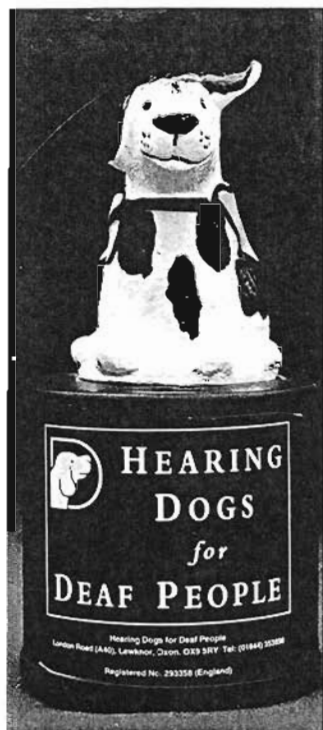
And before you say it, maybe producers should come in clutching their test results as well!

PAT HEIGHAM

Footnote: Some interesting research was announced last month in the US where researchers at the Harvard Medical School had succeeded in growing fully mature hair cells as found in the inner ear - those that detect sound - and whose loss causes deterioration of hearing capability. Unfortunately they have only managed this on mice so far, by culturing stem cells from a mouse embryo in a mix of growth factors that is similar to that found in the inner ear. The stem cells responded by developing into inner ear hair cells. If this technique can be applied to humans it might offer some help in restoring certain types of hearing impairment. Unfortunately it doesn't appear imminent. - Ed

HEARING DOGS FOR DEAF PEOPLE AMPS' ADOPTED CHARITY

As can be seen from the bar graph indicator below, our current collection stands at £2634 and we are confident that the target of £3000, to sponsor a kennel will easily be achieved.



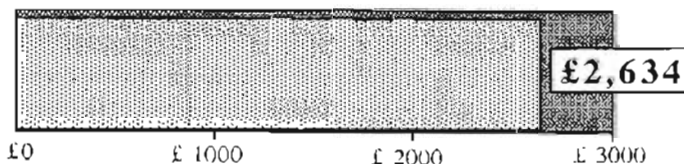
The increase from the last report is attributable in no small way to the generosity of Richmond Film Services, one of AMPS' Sustaining Members, who donated the proceeds of an Equipment Rummage Sale. Other sums were rendered by emptying the cardboard kennels, and it is reported that one post facility company utilised theirs as a swear box. (Maybe we should encourage the use of bad language!)

The £3000 to sponsor a kennel means that the charity has the facility to train

many more dogs per year, as approximately six canine recruits per kennel can be accommodated during those twelve months.

Earlier in 2003, Brian Hickin and Patrick Heigham went to visit the new training centre at Saunderton, near Princes Risborough and were able to inspect the recently completed kennel block where we hope that a plaque bearing the Association's new logo will be displayed, once the £3000 is reached. (We will not be handing over the total sum in one go, as monies have been forwarded from time to time and HDDP record a running total as it gradually increases.)

THE AMPS KENNEL FUND



Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
The Grange, Wycombe Road, Saunderton, Bucks HP27 9NS
Tel. 01844 348100 www.hearing-dogs.co.uk

THE AATON

Cantar-X

EVENING

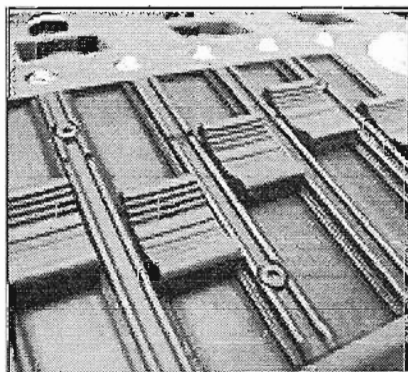
We hear directly from the designer of Aaton's distinctive Cantar-X location digital recorder. Jim Betteridge reports.

About 30 dedicated professionals from AMPS and IBS turned up on a damp Thursday evening in October to take a closer look at Aaton's location sound recorder, Cantar. Designer Jean-Pierre (JP) Beauviala was there together with Marketing Manager Martine Bianco to sing its praises and take a bit of flack from the hardened hype-busters amongst us; although in the event few faults were found.

The Cantar is an eight-track hard disk recorder with a sophisticated inbuilt mixer. Full details can be found at www.aaton.com/cantar but we thought we'd bring you a few highlights.

Released only weeks before the demo, a new 8x DVD+R/CD-R writer from Plexor, the PX708UF, is now the standard back-up/delivery system provided with the Cantar. At under £1 for a 4.7GB DVD+R disk, JP sees the format as ideal for copying-off the day's rushes (estimated at 2GB to 3GB a day) for delivery to audio post, while the humble CD-R can be used to deliver the stereo/mono mixdown.

Speaking of which, one very interesting area currently under discussion amongst location recorder manufacturers generally, is the use of fader automation to record the Production Mixer's fader movements as the mixdown is created. This then makes it possible to return to any tricky moments within a take and remix that section before sending it off to post. JP suggested a development of that idea could be that, rather than having a 6+2 format where only six of the available eight tracks are used for individual mic's with the two being for mix down, all eight tracks are used for separates and are delivered with the mix data embedded in metadata to recreate the mix in the destination machine. Clearly, for those picture editors uninterested in multi-track, this would have to be a transparent process. For the dialogue editor and re-recording mixer, however, it could be very useful.



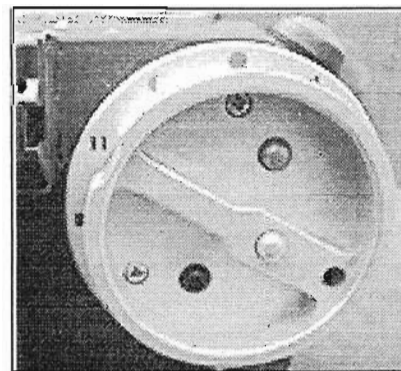
Six waterproof linear faders in addition to rotaries on inputs

Another interesting facility demonstrated was the wireless (Bluetooth) linking of a Palm-based PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) to enter and edit metadata, ie date, time, take, and comments, to a total of 256 characters. Using the right delivery formats the idea is that this information, will stay with the files all the way to the final mix arriving as text on the mixing console display. Clearly preferable to illegible scribbles on rain-soaked paper.

It was generally agreed that the ideal delivery method for sound rushes is BWF (Broadcast WAV) in an AES-31-3 format, which is what Cantar offers. It was noted that virtually every professional digital audio editing/mixing system supports file exchange via AES-31-3 with the disappointing exception of Digidesign's Pro Tools. The comment was also made that Avid, Digidesign's parent company, also remain closed to AES-31-3 import and export. There are, however, a number of third-party utilities that facilitate exchange between different systems and formats with Media Magic and Titan being discussed at the meeting.

The initial production run of Cantars has already been sold but the next run will be emerging at the end of November with a price tag of around £10,500 for a 60GB version.

Our thanks go to Interact Sound for providing an excellent venue for the event, and to Aaton for an informative presentation and a delicious spread of food and drink.



JIM BETTERIDGE

This joint IBS/AMPS meeting took place on 9th October at Interact Sound, 160 Barbly Road, London W10.

Further information on Cantar-X is to be found at www.aaton.com/products/sound/cantar

ANCIENT PERCUSSION

~ PRE-BELLS ~

Bells and tuned percussion generate strong emotional connections with Christmas. However simple a bell may seem, there is actually a lot of knowledge required to create an effective design. It therefore goes without saying that once there was a time before bells...

These engravings by Arnold van Westerhout come from Filippo Boninini's 1723 *Gabinetto Armonico*, which was based on Athanasius Kircher's collection of antiquities.

Verga di Metallo (right)

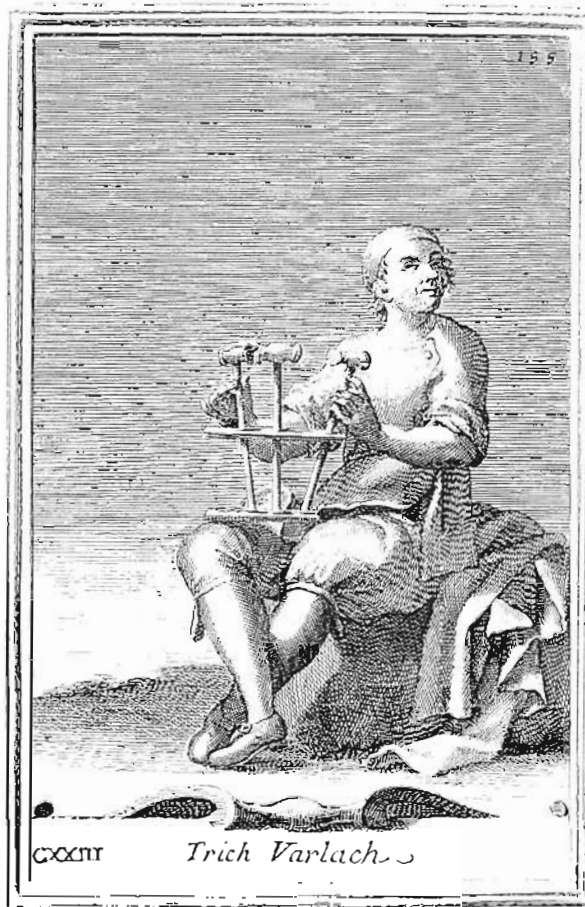
Suffering for art and demonstrating an acoustic effect. A metal bar is suspended by thick gut string held in the ears. When the bar is struck with a metal bar it should seem to the hearer like the tolling of a very large bell. (Ringing in the ears not necessarily tinnitus)

Campana Delli Greci (below)

Bells were not known in the Greek Church before the 11th Century. They used the illustrated device which consisted of a wooden plank struck by two mallets to give a distinct musical sound. It is suspended by a string held between the teeth. (A bit hard on the bridge work)

Trich Varlach (below right)

A Neapolitan folk instrument. It has three wooden hammers, the centre one fixed while the others are moved to strike against it. (Careful fingers needed)



The truth about Champagne

The way that a sip of Champagne causes your tongue to tingle seems to have nothing at all to do with the bubbles and the way that you imagine they are bursting over your tongue, Researchers in California (where else) who asked volunteers to dip their tongues in fizzy water found that the sensation is caused by carbonic acid acting as a chemical irritant.

This discovery was made with the help of a drug called acetazolamide which is taken to combat altitude sickness. One of the drug's side effects is that it dulls the tingle from carbonated drinks.

The volunteers were trained to rate the tingling sensation after they stuck their tongues in carbonated water for up to 15 seconds. The scale ranged from 0 for no sensation to 10 for the irritation that would be caused by hot peppers. Later their tongues were half coated with acetazolamide before asking them to dip their tongues into the test drinks once more, and report the tingle on each side of the tongue. The scores were significantly lower on the side coated with the drug.

Acetazolamide blocks carbonic anhydrase, an enzyme which converts carbon dioxide into carbonic acid. Researchers believe that the sensation of 'fizziness' depends on the reaction with the carbonic anhydrase taking the carbon dioxide gas, dissolving it in the saliva which then percolates through the fatty tissues in the tongue and converts it into carbonic acid.

Supporting evidence comes from separate study where volunteers drank carbonated drinks in a hyperbaric chamber, where the high pressure stopped bubbles forming in the drinks. Apparently they still got the tingling sensation.

Drinks that contain other gases seem less 'fizzy'. The bubbles in Guinness and some other beers are mostly composed of Nitrogen and seems far smoother on the tongue than carbonated drinks.

Our apologies if this spoils your enjoyment - just have a second glass and you'll forget about it.

Four Minute Warning warning

A couple of years ago, Playwright Alan Ayckbourn was interviewed for BBC Radio 4's *Start the Week*. He described walking into a BBC studio in Leeds before the end of the cold war and seeing a funny-looking machine in the corner. "I asked the engineer what it was and he said, 'Oh, that's the four-minute warning machine. If it stops ticking, we have to issue the four-minute warning of imminent nuclear attack'."

A pause, "But it's not ticking," said the playwright. "Yeah, it drove me nuts so I had to turn it off," said the engineer blithely.

Christmas warning

Despite Christmas being a time of peace and goodwill to all men there is nothing to stop ourselves being dangerous to ourselves as this hotchpotch of statistics proves.... Be careful out there.

- * 3 people die each year testing if a 9v battery works on their tongue.
- * 142 people were injured in 1998 by not removing all pins from new shirts.
- * 58 people are injured each year by using sharp knives instead of screwdrivers.
- * 31 people have died since 1996 by watering their Christmas tree while the fairy lights were plugged in.
- * 19 people have died in the last 3 years believing that Christmas decorations were chocolate.
- * Hospitals reported 4 broken arms last year after cracker pulling accidents.
- * 101 people since 1997 have had to have broken parts of plastic toys pulled out of the soles of their feet.
- * 18 people had serious burns in 1998 trying on a new jumper with a lit cigarette in their mouth.
- * A massive 543 people were admitted to A&E in the last two years after opening bottles of beer with their teeth.

ODDMENTS, BITS & BOBS

* 5 people were injured last year in accidents involving out of control Scalextric cars.
.....and.....

* 8 people cracked their skull in 1997 after falling asleep while throwing up into the toilet.

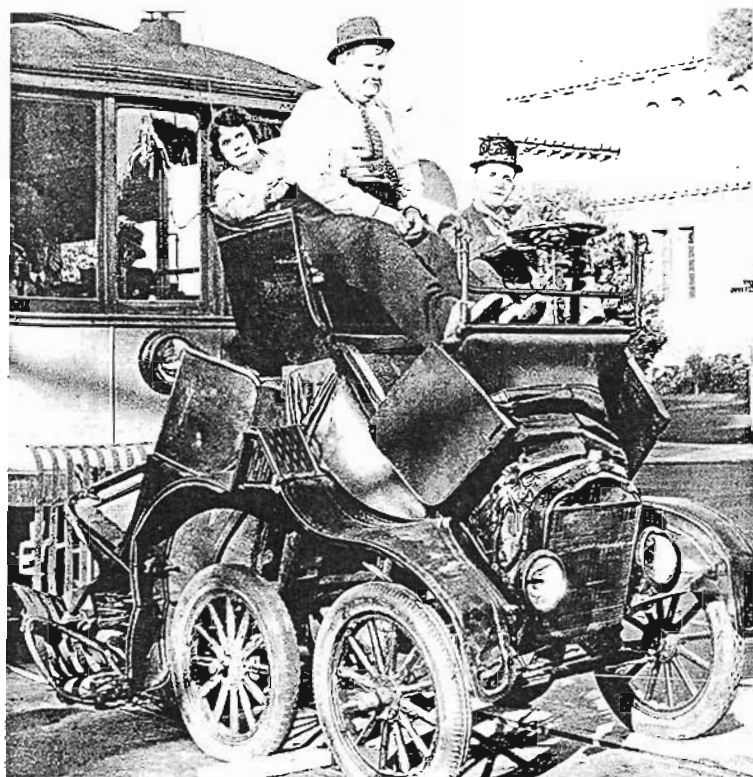
Emoticons for Christmas

For those of you adept at creating Emoticons, (those combinations of keyboard characters that take on a lateral facial expression to convey the mood of the writer) how about these festive examples. If you have no idea what this is about, ask a nearby child.

- :*) I am drunk
- %-) I am drunk but happy
- :-S I am confused
- :-W I am lying (forked tongue)
- /- I am stirring up trouble

A COLLECTION OF COMEDIANS & THEIR CARS

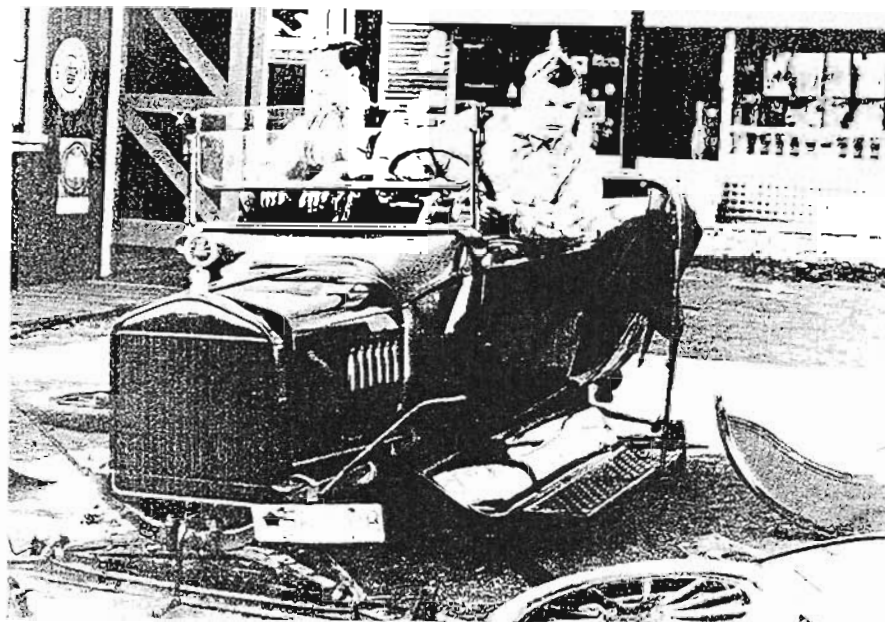
Since the early days of movies cars have played important roles in many comedic and dramatic films. These days, the fast, exciting, epic car chase is getting a bit old hat so why not re-invent the comic car chase? For that matter why not re-invent the comic movie?



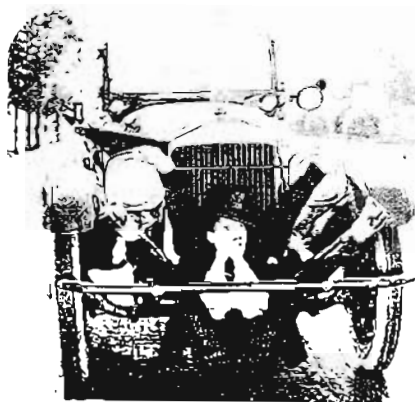
LAUREL & HARDY



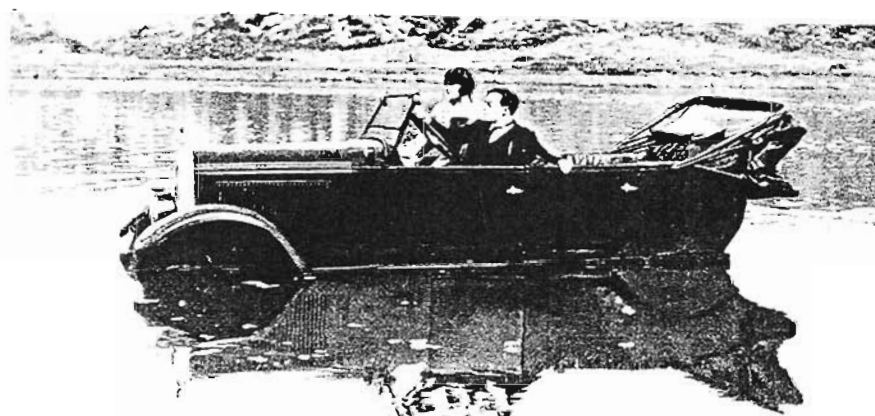
KEYSTONE COPS



BUSTER KEATON and FATTY ARBUCKLE



CHARLIE CHASE



BUSTER KEATON and MARCELINE DAY

Recording Sahara with Michael Palin

Michael Palin's Sahara documentary series was one of the hit factual programmes of 2003 and nominated for a BAFTA Craft award in the Factual Sound category. AMPS member John Pritchard is no stranger to roaming the globe with Palin - he's currently in the Himalayas on the next series. Here is the complete story of work and desert life.

First Turn Over 6th Feb 2001 ~ Final Slate 23rd Feb 2002

I should make it clear at the outset that I am not a Ray Mears bug-eating, rough-sleeping, river-washing, all-terrain life-in-the-wild recordist. Until now all-terrain, for me, meant softening the tyres on the Urstacart to surmount the numerous fat lighting cables around the sets on a stage. My insecurity rises in proportion to the distance that I am from a Waitrose, and my introduction to a tent for the first time in my life (in the living room) had been only five months earlier. That was for a National Geographic shoot also with cameraman Nigel Meakin, and on 16mm film as well.

Out among the dunes, when the sun went down (obvious I know) the lights went out. sanitary ware and mains electricity were also absent in the gloom. Paper work, the daily housekeeping, and anything needing a screwdriver was best accomplished during the daylight hours, shoot permitting. Attending to the call of nature at night was generally best conducted 'lights out' partly to discourage inquisitive insects, but also to avoid providing a beacon for the inevitable children who would appear out of nowhere every time our caravan stopped. Toilet paper had to be burnt as it degrades much slower than human waste, so it was quite common at night to see a flare of light in the distance, followed by the small bonfire illuminating a concerned face as stray tissue was coaxed into the pathetic little fire.

A Petzl LED head torch was one of my best investments. Three AAA batteries provided a pool of white light for hours, and freed the hands for other duties. Transport was mostly by four or five Toyota Landcruisers one of which, the pick-up version, was loaded with camping material. Carrying plenty of bottled water for drinking, we relied upon well water (where available) for washing. Unable to shower each day, I was surprised how the discomfort associated with sweaty limbs doesn't get any worse after day one. We sometimes had a morning ration of water in an aluminium bowl. Face first, then head and hair, followed by other parts south concluding with the feet, and finally rinsing out socks. Has one litre of water ever been utilised so efficiently?

Freshly baked bread (cooked just before breakfast and a wee bit sandy) was a staple and very good. The meat course wandered along with us on the hoof, and was despatched minutes before being casseroleed. The Touareg (and Wodaabe) consider our attitude toward sanitised prepared meat hypocritical, and I suspect wasteful. Little is thrown away in this environment, the skin is used subsequently as a water bottle. Evaporation loss through the fur (especially hanging outside a moving car) cooled the water inside very effectively. Water in plastic bottles was flavoured with orange or lemon vitamin C fizzy

tablets, or with a tea bag inside, and deliberately heated in the sun for a good cuppa. Tirelli was one of the hottest places with a midday temperature of 55°C/131°F, where the ferrules on the boom pole were too hot to touch. The Dogon who previously would have sacrificed us, or certainly our figurehead (director or presenter?) now find it more beneficial to sell us Heineken from an elderly gas-powered fridge.

Camel is delicious, lean in the manner of venison but more crumbly and slightly sweet. We were to learn that the camel is a walking pharmacy with milk healthier than that from a cow, very lean meat, tasty liver, magical feet and of course, those gorgeous eyelashes.

The prospect of a film series about the Sahara was first mooted on the shoot of Michael Palin's *Hemingway Adventure*. I began Hemingway with a Portadat recorder and SQN IV mixer combination, but with NP1 batteries, a couple of Micron receivers and other bits, the total weight is considerable. The Portadat had a leisurely attitude towards starting and stopping so something lighter and more user-friendly had to be found for *Sahara*. Hard disk and solid state memory machines were considered, but rushes had to be freightable, so it seemed logical to use DAT.

If it isn't a Portadat, then the only other serious contender is the Fostex PD-4 which I first used in anger on a feature in 2000. Sporting a modest three channel mixer that is neither as forgiving or versatile as the SQN, it's nonetheless reminiscent of a Nagra IV in being a reasonably light, one-box solution to location timecode stereo recording.

The Sahara apparently comprises only 15% sand, but the amount of airborne detritus encountered was a considerable nuisance. It was initially discouraged from the innards of the recorder by bagging the machine in polythene. Operating (and cabling) a recorder in this way however proved quite impossible, especially if speed is required. Eventually I found it better to have the machine naked within a snug KT Systems bag, but with a folded Mothercare terry towelling nappy over the top (switch covered) panel, and the excess nappy folded over the exposed front of the recorder where it protected the Record and Pause keys while keeping the sun off the LCD. Gradually I evolved the routine where once a week I unscrewed the panels, pulled off the knobs, and swept out the interior of the PD-4. The worst area for sand ingress was the front panel where it would lodge beneath the fader skirts and the Start ID key which was more or less sand jammed for a year! Apart from this minor irritation the machine performed perfectly throughout, despite a lot of abuse and the heat. I have a couple of PD-4s but elected to take a tiny Sony TCD-7 as the back-up recorder in order to keep baggage size and weight down, but this machine was never needed.

Driving from Tindouf in Algeria to Zouerat in Mauritania, a relentless howling wind stirred up quite a storm and I saw first hand how airborne sand grounds walkie talkie signals and reduced the range of UHF transmissions to a few feet. The following day, while filming the loading of a huge (one mile

long) freight train with iron ore at Guelb, Bob Watt our fixer warned of the danger of strong and wild magnetic fields on the mounds of iron dust over which we were climbing. Alarming loud fizzing sounds accompanied the deluge of ore into each railway wagon which is filled at a rate of 100 tonnes a minute, and I was uncertain about the effect that this would have on my modest magnetic recorder.



During Tabaski (mass Goat slaughter) Michael Palin gets "put back on the Air" as he is reunited with a transmitter.

Conditions were atrocious and I was much more concerned about keeping the ore/sand mixture out of my own lungs than fretting about the coercivity of BASF DAT stock. The 'off tape' monitor seemed to confirm a satisfactory recording and the "error" light wasn't flashing so I pressed on. My HD25 headphones were filled with large scale stereo industrial noises, clattering railway wagons underscored by spine tingling, mournful wails from the engine sirens - great stuff.

Film Editor Alex Richardson was perfectly at home dealing with M&S recording for effects and music, and providing all was logged, used everything supplied to good effect. The serious drawback of using the three input Fostex alone is the constant plugging and switching necessary to go from two radio mics and a mono pole mic, to the M&S pair and maybe one radio. Grovelling about in the bag (under the nappy) to switch the powering and line/mic option as well as the front panel track allocation is unsatisfactory, and more than once I let good stereo slip into mono through lack of time to reconfigure. I had discussed additional inputs with Will Blackham (LTF) and was carrying his excellent baby Wendt mixer, but as this added yet more weight and battery consumption, it wasn't always with me in the bag.

Power was a constant worry and I started working with one Hawk-Woods NPI as a back up inside the Fostex, and an active NPI in a sleeve within the KT bag. After a while and depending on logistics, I used a single PAG 14 volt leather battery belt rather than the three or four NPIs which a day's filming demanded. Throughout the journey we carried a small Honda two stroke generator roughly the size of a fuel can, and the end of each day would be spent erecting tents to the cheery buzz of the generator and the twinkling of assorted battery charger lights.

My own cavalier attitude towards power protection

became apparent as we climbed the Tichka Pass through the Atlas mountains in a fine, if mature coach, to constant readings of the Koran, off tape. The bagged recorder nestling in my lap seemed to be quite warm.

In fact it wasn't my body heat reflected but was getting very very hot of its own accord. The lightweight tail from the NPI sleeve had shorted in the inky dink HiRose plug that I had fitted - fuseless! The NPI was horrifically and potentially explosively hot. With some trepidation and barely able to touch it, I slipped the battery out and placed it on the floor of the coach, beneath my Billingham bag in order to absorb the inevitable explosion. It did cool without drama, and continues to perform rather well to this day, but now within a new electronically protected sleeve. It was also during this period that I discovered an uncased Micron Transmitter will slip rather neatly into the NPI battery sleeve where the stainless steel case connects with the contacts rather too well - more smoke, oh dear.

Principal microphones were a Sennheiser MKH 60/30 pair crammed into a 416 gag on very stiff (home made - sorry Vivien) suspension, which provided a reasonably coherent stereo image. Mics always travelled within the gag where foam rubber strips packed alongside them relieved the suspension of duties. Also in the case was a Sanken CS-3 which sometimes hints at a better "suck" than the Sennheiser 60 but is inconsistent and environment



Wrapped for the Dairy, I to r Michael Palin, Nancy Jones, Roger Mills (Exec Prod & Director) Nigel Meakin, Peter Meakin and JP

sensitive. Body mics were Sanken COS-11 personals which are bright and clear but desperately sensitive to wind noise. Fitted within the Sanken rubber sleeve, they are swathed in felt and stuck beneath the Palin, Gap bought, Oxford button down shirt front, between buttons, using a tenacious Radiospares (268-2042) double sided tape. The bright rising response exacerbates clothing rustle and chest hair scratchiness, so although Michael Palin is a most helpful, generous and professional travelling film star, I have thus far balked at asking him to shave his chest.

Peli Protector Cases proved invaluable throughout. Waterproof they shrugged off the sand and dust easily, and with the generous foam padding ensured that everything withstood the ferocious pounding of travel. I isolated various items within the case using Radiospares zip-closed test meter cases. These

"sponge-bag" containers fitted the PAG charger perfectly and divided other bits of the kit into easily identified units, they also offer a bit more protection from baggage handling. Journeys of twelve hours or more hard driving over rutted rock strewn sand in the back of a leaf sprung Toyota pick-up were very destructive. My tiny all-solid-state Sony ICF-SW100 World band radio terminally failed after just one eight hour journey packed inside a shoe with clothing as a (useless) shock absorber. Similarly Nigel's battery light and charger, packed in a metal case, were in a constant state of vibration induced failure, and demanded soldering iron attention throughout the shoot. Maintenance time was a luxury, so two (at least) of everything was the packing mantra. The PAG124 charger was replicated by the individual built in charger on the battery belt avoiding exact duplication. The second channel comprising the Sony TCD-7 and Wendt NGS-X2 could have got me out of a fix, but was not necessary.



Pen has his COS11 Mic adjusted. Mothercare swathed PD-4 and curly lead to battery belt clearly visible

Timecode held the show together and ran throughout the day so the Aaton Prod was jammed first thing in the morning, and refreshed later in the day. The twinkling LED on the Aaton, which resembles a heartbeat, was easily monitored by myself as well as all on camera. Alex requested boards where convenient but the Meakin finger defeated the most smartly administered clapper, and a years' work concluded on slate 387 which really is shamefully low. I can't keep up with administration at the shooting rate that Nigel is capable of achieving, so I used a micro cassette machine to log the shot-end timecode reading, as well as any other detail concerning the recording or sequence. The sound log thus became quite a detailed shot list, and although I enjoyed for a while logging via a Psion 5mx/ HP 340 printer, I eventually reverted to pre-printed forms and a pen.

During my unexpected (and nerve wracked) BAFTA acceptance speech in March 2000 for the *Hemingway*, I paid tribute to Audio Engineering, and the Micron radio mics. Nerdy as this was viewed at the time, I did genuinely mean that more than just a little credit for some of the memorable moments of the final films owed a lot to Aldo Hagli and the design of the Micron limiter. Any recordist faced with a pianist at a keyboard, who is



Dictaphone time - child in foreground thinks I'm bonkers

showing by example and talking throughout, knows how well a Micron transmitter will cope with this wide range situation. In Mali, Toumani Diabate gave a delicious masterclass on the kora to Michael. This twenty one stringed harp/lute-gourd-based instrument sounded magical, and the wide dynamics were handled with ease.

Later at Tirelli (also in Mali) Michael was being shown an old flintlock gun by a hunter. Predictably it failed to fire for the first couple of takes. Two Microns were on and the MKH60 was aimed at a wall behind the camera to add some reverberation to the shot when it finally came. Frustrated the hunter poured more and more saltpetre into the breech of the musket which of course finally fired with the most enormous explosion. Michael reeled back and embarrassingly at this point the voice of Alfie Trustram, an armourer with the BBC from years ago, came into my head. He would never tolerate someone standing on the flint side of a flintlock gun during firing, because of blast from the pan. The Micron limiter handled the shot perfectly providing a good fat bang, and popped back up to continue the dialogue as "surgery" on Michael got under way



Wall Painting at Tombouctou (Timbuktu) used for crane shot and book fly: l to r Peter Meakin, Nigel Meakin and JP.

on camera, and an extended version of this part of the entertainment is available on the Sahara BBC DVD from all good retailers.

It would not do for me to conclude this article without saying that we were visiting some of the

Recording Sahara with Michael Palin *(continued)*
poorest and most deprived people on this planet, and without exception were treated with enormous generosity, kindness and a great deal of good humour throughout. As I've found travelling in this business so many times before, those with the least gave the most, unhesitatingly.

Sahara transmissions attracted weekly BBC1 audiences of just under nine million throughout the journey. The success of this "old fashioned" film making – the camera is mostly level and still – has provoked the BBC to request more of the same. Off to pack once more then, in order to follow the great man, national treasure, iconic comedian and, (he will hate all this) thoroughly decent fellow, on his next genial broad minded exploration of foreign lands and lives, early in 2003 – with a Fostex PD-6.

JOHN PRITCHARD

BACKGROUND : JOHN PRITCHARD

John Pritchard was born in Cornwall during a blizzard in 1947, and brought up in Wiltshire where his parents ran an hotel. At the age of eight he poked wooden a handled screwdriver into a live 5 amp socket, fusing a great many lights. The local electrician remained perplexed for many hours, unable to locate the small wooden fuse box responsible for those dead circuits.

After selling electrical goods with Wessex Wholesale Electric in the city of Bath, the Rank Organisation introduced him to the carbon arc and later Cinemation. This latter seemed to be largely responsible for miscued houselights and unpredictable premature projector changeovers.

The BBC beckoned in 1968 where after a lengthy induction course detailing the thirty five methods of claiming for the cost of a lunch, he became a Trainee Assistant Film Sound Recordist. Many years followed surrounded by hot valves in Dubbing and Sound Transfer areas, the new Keller double speed copying machines, temperamental Westrex mag bays and quarter inch mangling Leavers-Rich tape machines.

His early on-road experience with Film Department of the BBC was with recordist's insecure at the loss of the Perfectone recorder, and wary of the new fangled Nagra III while shooting black and white TV insert material on 35mm film.

Freelance now, his CV lists over fifty 'all film' drama productions for Cinema and Television, two BAFTA awards, and a nomination.

He is more recently to be found wandering about the planet with Michael Palin, and clutching a large roll of double sided tape.

Recording Sahara with Michael Palin : a postscript - December 2003

Sahara was nominated for a Sound Craft Academy award in the Factual category, but the excellent BBC OB Queens Jubilee (all day) Concert deservedly won.

It is now a week since I returned from Lhasa hospital in China following four days of excellent treatment for acute Pulmonary Oedema (fluid in the lungs) acquired while climbing Everest at 17,000ft with Mr Palin and his jolly band.

Himalaya is now three quarters 'in the can' and of course has not been entirely incident free, especially in the sound department. Michael Palin proposed this journey in 2002 which is probably one of the few areas left in the world where he can have a bit of a wander. It comprises a route from left to right along the line of the Himalaya range, beginning in Pakistan then off through India, Nepal, Tibet, China, Bhutan, Nagaland and Bangladesh. Deviating all over the place to take in curious ritual and local colour, in the traditional Palin way.

I was loaned a Fostex PD-6 over the Easter period, and instantly fell in love with it. For documentary work its six channel mixer (prefade listen on each) buffer pre-roll record and location robust, low cost media were icing on the potential 'stereo plus four track' recording cake. Long before shooting I was enthusing with the editor over this new machine and he shared my excitement. However my suggestion provoked reactions of horror from the labs, and work load concerns from the dubbing mixer. I hadn't intended the DVDs to be a multi channel audio fest, but an occasional clean feed in parallel with radio mics would have made the initial recording task slightly easier. I suppose in truth I harboured some concern over the newness of the whole system, but as a pathetic early adopter filled with 'techno joy' (copyright Eddie Izzard) I wanted to go DVD. Eventually DAT was the decision: too much at stake, such remote locations, unknown environmental hazards and the final nail when the executive producer put all his faith in me with a 'I don't like new ways of doing things, but if you think it's right?' which conspired to frighten me back to my old friend the PD-4 and cassettes of oxide tape.

A crackling new Sennheiser 418 at 12,000ft; intermittent Trams (personal mics); a brief hospital visit in Chitral; complete mic input failure on all three channels of the PD-4 in Kathmandu; the Maoists 'little chat'; equipment in one place, crew in another at Simla, and further technical hurdles before eventually being detained at Lhasa hospital having wandered in for advice. A bit of a cough and some gurgling in the lungs turned out to be more serious than a quick course of pills. That the hospital doesn't provide food, expect you to bathe, or have anything more than the most (most) rudimentary toilets should not be a judgement against the fantastic and lovely staff, or their competence. They have a lot of experience of altitude sickness, and a reputation for excellence second to none.

The fun and games continues until March of 2004 – on DAT, and will be broadcast at the end of the year.

QUOTABLES

A loud actor is a good actor

Anon (understandably)

RPS : New European Large Format Film Recording Service

Film recording specialist RPS have launched their new system for large format (65mm) film recording, working in collaboration with Gulliver Laboratory in Paris; large-format post production supervisor Andrew Oran; and Anthony Faust, Golden Reel Award winning Supervising Sound Editor on *The Human Body*.

Formed by Simon Burley and Allan Curtis, RPS is Europe's only company able to perform such a transfer. Their first transfer is the video-to-IMAX film conversion of Smirnoff's *Trainer* commercial which will be shown before *Matrix Revolutions The IMAX Experience*.

RPS can transfer both existing and newly made commercials. These can then be shown before large format blockbuster films such as *Matrix Revolutions The IMAX Experience*, *Ghosts Of The Abyss* and *Bugs!*

Andrew Oran, who has worked on over a hundred IMAX films and supervised the transfer says, "This was my first experience working with RPS, on their first IMAX project, and I was impressed by their professionalism, attention to detail and the excellence of their service. They're a welcome addition to the large format family of service providers, and I look forward to our next project together."

RPS Film Imaging draws heavily on its technical staff who have years of experience in the film and post production industries. Passionate about film recording, Simon Burley has a particularly close association with recorders having first started out in maintenance of these machines. Translating his extensive knowledge into computer programming, Simon achieved a very successful launch of 'video-to-35mm film software' at Lip Sync Post in 2001.

"Taking 8mm archive footage up to 35mm was just one of the ways the high quality output could be demonstrated and the logical step was to enhance the software further to cope with 65mm recording. The presence of a large format film recording service in Europe will open many doors for European producers and studios alike" says Simon, "and we soon hope to attract more work to these shores as we become a centre of large format recording excellence."

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DOLBY : Acquires Cinea

Dolby has acquired Cinea, a start-up content-protection and anti-piracy technology company based in Virginia. Cinea will operate as a wholly owned subsidiary of Dolby Laboratories. Cinea CEO and founder Robert Schumann becomes head of the new Dolby subsidiary, reporting to Tim Partridge, Vice President, Professional Division, Dolby Laboratories.

"Content is increasingly being delivered digitally, and unauthorised use of digital content can have serious consequences for the content owner. Content protection has thus become an ever more important element in enabling the delivery of high-quality entertainment," said Partridge.

Cinea Inc was founded in 1999 to develop and commercialise a broad variety of content protection solutions for markets that include digital cinema, in-flight entertainment, high-definition DVD, and video on demand using expertise in key areas such as highly secure hardware and software, watermarking and fingerprinting, back-end content protection infrastructure, and camcorder anti-piracy.

Most of Cinea's staff previously formed the senior technical and operating team for Digital Video Express, LP (Divx), a Circuit City subsidiary that implemented a highly secure DVD-based delivery system.

DTS : has announced that more than 200 million consumer electronics products containing DTS-licensed technology or intellectual property have been sold worldwide. More than 200 consumer electronics manufacturers worldwide license DTS technology today.

DOLBY : ZDF, German TV broadcaster has started broadcasting its popular *Wetten, dass..?* entertainment show live in Dolby 5.1 Digital. German radio broadcasters Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) and Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) have demonstrated the world's first Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound radio services with the former now a permanent feature.

DTS : the XD10 digital cinema-ready media player is the first in a new XD series for the cinema industry. It is an expandable and user-friendly media solution for pre-show and feature film presentation and compatible with both traditional film playback and emerging Digital Cinema. It can deliver up to 10 channels of digital surround sound (8-channel playback with 2 channels for alternate audio). For reliability, the XD10 incorporates an internal hard drive that is used as the film sound signal source. Two DVD drives enable download of film sound information to the hard drive. When discs are loaded into the player, the system downloads the first reel (in approximately 30 seconds), and then begins to play the film. The balance of the reels is recorded onto the XD10 hard drive while the first reel is being played. The downloading process only needs to be performed once. From that point on, playback is automatic. The XD10 will automatically load and store up to 30 full-length film soundtracks. This gives distributors and exhibitors the flexibility of storing multiple languages of one title or multiple titles. Subsequent loading is accommodated by sequential replacement of previously loaded films. The XD10 is also capable of playing back enhanced video for alternate media and has networking and pre-show programming features for an integrated presentation.

Integration: The Big Idea

The media world is becoming increasingly joined-up. What has been an often loose association of separate crafts is becoming a seamless web of integrated digital elements. That's the plan, anyway. Jim Betteridge takes a closer look.

The need for integration is increased by the explosion of programme makers and the channels through which their wares are exploited. The multi-channel, multi-country, multi-language, multi-media world demands a huge amount of precise and reliable information to accompany each clip used in a production and issues around ownership and rights clearances are an increasing headache for all concerned. Throwing a hastily completed and easily lost report sheet in with the tape is fast becoming insufficient.

Beyond Tape

So as tape itself becomes a thing of the past and networked file-based systems take over, the data management tools that have facilitated the information revolution in general are being applied to the management of film and broadcast content. A whole new industry has sprung-up developing these new tools and with it a forest of new terminologies and acronyms. Two terms worth getting your head around are Essence and Metadata. These are the two basic parts into which a project is split for the purposes of media management. Essence consists of picture, sound and other forms of data that can be directly perceived, while Metadata is data that describes essence data, or provides supplementary information about it. This might include anything from sample rate, file length, edits, fades, effects etc. to packaging and copyright ownership. Currently, the inability to exchange such metadata between systems or between stages in the production chain often results in considerable duplication of effort by technicians, creatives and management. So programme makers will increasingly be required to provide salient information in a prescribed form and once entered into the system it will stay with the project through all its production stages and incarnations. Then, five years later, when a 30 second clip is used in a magazine programme in Turkey, all rights issues will be automatically addressed and you'll get your £57.00 royalty payment dropped into your account in Tunbridge Wells.

It should be said that we're currently a long way from that and the amount of work that's needed to allow reliable information exchange, using a shared set of UMIDs (Unique Material Identifiers), between all the organisations and database types concerned is daunting, but it has begun! So, in the long run, the new wave of file-based location recorders need to be seen in the bigger context of all this smart media management. The potential advantages they offer over tape recorders goes

beyond simple non-linear access and faster-than-realtime copying, etc, it's their flexibility in terms of format conversion and the metadata they can carry that increases their relevance to what the managers have planned for the future of the media industry.

Beyond OMF

On the new acronym front, the one that most concerns us in the production side of the media industry is AAF or Advanced Authoring Format. In effect it's going to be a replacement for OMF (Open Media Framework) and indeed its core code is taken from OMF. But AAF is going to contain a far broader data set designed to fit into this larger picture of data management. OMF was developed by Avid to allow exchange of picture and/or sound with other audio-visual systems. Any third party was given access to the code to make their product OMF-compatible and most of the major DAW manufacturers took up the offer. Widely used in the television industry for transporting the sound element of an Avid or Final Cut Pro edit into a third-party DAW, the OMF format has been

both boon and burden to the audio industry. When it works it can undoubtedly offer advantages over auto-conforming but when it doesn't work it can be a real nightmare. The main problem is that when Avid comes out with a software revision the OMF code is often inadvertently subtly altered and becomes a closed door to once compatible systems. A frantic round of software re-writes by the third parties returns harmony to the fold, but only until the next Avid revision. It's a fretful existence.

So it's good news that a replacement is being developed. Fostered not by an individual company but by an industry-wide association the AAF specification is intended to go far beyond that of OMF. The board of the AAF Association reads like a who's who of media creation and includes: Avid, BBC, Cable News Network, Discreet, Fox, Microsoft, Panasonic, Pinnacle, Quantel and Sony. Then there are what they call 'General Members', who have signed-up to the idea of compliance and who are also involved in the shaping of the format. These include Adobe, Apple, Da Vinci, Fast Multimedia, Pandora, SGI, Snell & Wilcox, Thomson Grass Valley and Warner Bros. This impressive list represents a serious attempt to provide interoperability between often competing forces within the media industry and as such is laudable. Quantel systems are already broadly AAF capable and have been for some time. New Avid and Digidesign systems are compliant. AMS Neve products will feature AAF from the end of the year and over the coming months and years you will see an increasing number of products from other manufacturers supporting the format. These are, though, early days and it seems that these initial implementations won't offer a great deal more than OMF in terms of data sets for audio.

There will be some familiar audio industry names that do not support AAF. The problem from the point of view of smaller companies is that AAF's broad

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capabilities come at the price of complexity. This was also an issue with OMF which took the best equipped R&D teams over a year to implement and, famously, one well-known DAW manufacturer spent two years trying before finally giving up. AAF, they complain, will require the same costly commitment and, because of the power of the AAF members, there won't effectively be another game in town. From the audio industry's point of view there is a simpler, cheaper alternative in AES31. This is an open standard for the exchange of audio projects and because it doesn't deal with pictures, it is infinitely simpler; the same DAW manufacturer mentioned above took just two weeks to implement it. It's conceived of in four levels, the first three of which are already fully functioning and allow the 'meat and potatoes', of a project to be transferred in a similar way to OMF: a multitrack ADL-based project with track, timing, fade and limited level information. ADL stands for Audio Decision List - basically a sample-accurate audio EDL. Being simple, cheap and effective, you will find AES31-3 compatibility on most modern DAWs.

A huge amount of work and goodwill has gone into the project to date and it was hoped by many that the audio industry would also forge ahead with the fourth level, AES31-4, wherein an object oriented project structure - like OMF or AAF - would be defined allowing a much broader range of metadata parameters to be exchanged including dynamics, EQ, reverb, level contouring and conceivably any other form of signal processing. One of the advantages of using a 'virtual studio', style of audio workstation like Nuendo, ProTools or Pyramix, is that all the processing can be independent of any hardware mixer and can simply be transported from the cutting or premix rooms into the dubbing theatre. The ultimate idea with AES31-4 was that all the detailed processing of a project could be transported from one platform to another, so your Nuendo project could effectively be played back or re-edited on an Audiofile with all its dynamics and reverbs, etc, in place - not rendered, but recreated by the Audiofile's processing. With Avid/Digidesign's earlier statement that they do not intend to support AES31 but would instead focus exclusively on AAF, it seems that the fourth level is unlikely to be pursued in this form. In fact many think it's unlikely that it would ever have been realised because of the difficulty of reliably transferring the perceived effect of one manufacturer's process to another's system. It's very clear that technical specifications alone don't explain why one reverb unit, EQ or compressor sounds better than another, and the subjective reliability of the chain would always be in question: "I'm sure it sounded better in the premix. Has anything changed?"

So perhaps the AES31 project has already achieved what it realistically can and level four never really was on the cards. With all the big names putting huge amounts of money and effort into AAF there is an understandable reluctance by them to countenance

the trouble and expense of implementing another exchange protocol on their equipment which they see as largely redundant in the light of AAF. AES31 may still be used for some time to come to move projects between audio systems in basic form but it's very likely that in time it will be eclipsed by AAF.

Being able to quickly and effectively import the audio from an Avid project into your DAW is a significant part of any post house's sales pitch. Currently we all use OMF and Avid say there are no plans to discontinue it, but surely the writing must be on the wall? If your kit doesn't support it, though, there are ways around it with third party interchange software such as Media Magic from Dark Matter Digital. This is a Mac-based program capable of converting between a number of different formats including AES31, Akai, Fairlight, OMF and ProTools. It can currently convert from AAF and should soon also be able to convert to it. In fact it may be more efficient to have one or more computers - that old G3 - dedicated to project conversion rather than tying up your audio workstation.

Beyond AAF

The AAF Association are keen to support innovation. They recognise that, while their baseline set of parameters is very broad, some manufacturers may have additional forms of data that are not yet included by them and so may wish to extend the set for their own private purposes. At a later stage these might, by agreement, be incorporated into the standard AAF set. Avid intend to use this facility to create their own extended exchange format called AFE (Avid File Exchange) that only the Avid family of products will have access to - and from the audio point of view, that means Digidesign. Any AAF compliant device will be able to import the basic parameter set but the extra will only be available to Digidesign owners. It's true to say that any other manufacturer is free to provide a similar set of proprietary extensions to work within their own product group but, because Avid are so dominant in the field, there is a concern amongst other manufacturers that they are trying to protect their monopoly by creating this exclusivity. Avid are keen to point out that the basic AAF data set will be sufficient for the vast majority of day-to-day interchange requirements and that their extensions may not actually be of interest to many users. Only time and experience will tell on that score. Bearing in mind the practical limitations as discussed with regard to AES31-4, it may well not make much of a difference anyway. It could be considered against the spirit of the AAF for a manufacturer to use these extensions to protect their market position but there again, who in Avid's position wouldn't want to keep an edge on the competition?

And as AAF helps create a more level playing field the competition is indeed hotting up. Apple continue to improve Final Cut Pro, offering a very

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Integration : The Big Idea (continued)

cost-effective solution from DV to HD. Their acquisition of Emagic has resulted in Final Cut Pro 4 having improved audio facilities to match its enhanced picture manipulation features and, at the top end of the market, their acquisition of the high res compositing software company Shake has made clients of top Hollywood blockbusters such as *Lord of the Rings*. FCP is already AAF compliant using a plug-in from Automatic Duck. Similarly, Pinnacle's purchasing of Steinberg (Nuendo) points towards greater integration of picture and sound in future products, all of which will likely comply with AAF. Add to that the large contracts that Quantel are winning in the UK and in the States in sports television production and it's clear that there are some powerful forces at play.

Whatever your position in the media industry and whichever manufacturer you're invested in, AAF offers the potential for an unprecedented level of communication, interoperability and data management, and in the long run that has to be a good thing.

JIM BETTERIDGE

ACRONYMS

AAF: Advanced Authoring Format - media exchange format

ADL: Audio Decision List - a sample-accurate EDL as referred to in the AES31 format

AES: Audio Engineering Society

AES31: Audio project exchange format

AFF: Avid File Exchange - Avid's extension of AAF

FCP: Final Cut Pro - Apple video editing software

MOMS: Media Object Management System - a BBC format

MXF: Material eXchange Format - simpler subset of AAF

P_META: EBU Metadata exchange scheme, to allow different metadata systems to converse.

SDK: Software Developers. Kit

SMEF: Standard Media Exchange Framework - BBC format for data exchange

UMID: Unique Material Identifier - everything gets its own unique tag so there's no confusion.

USEFUL LINKS

AAF: www.aafassociation.org

AAF for FCP 4: www.automaticduck.com

AES: www.aes.org

FCP 4: www.apple.com/finalcutpro/audioediting.html

Media Magic: www.darkmatterdigital.com

MXF: www.pro-mpeg.org/index2.html

P_META: www.ebu.ch/tech_32/tech_t3295.html

SMEF: www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines-smef

The British Vintage Wireless Society's

National Vintage Communications Fair

The NEC, Birmingham, 2nd May 2004

We have to make it clear that we've never been to this event organised by the British Vintage Wireless Society but it has been recommended enthusiastically by an AMPS colleague interested in the history of electronics and communications. If you want to follow their recommendation this is what you'll find - it is much more than old radios!

Essentially it is an antique-type collectors fair specialising in early technology. It's been running for over ten years with two events a year at the NEC and supported by 300 odd specialist dealers from the UK, Europe and USA. Aside from complete items, the Fair is useful for anyone trying to restore old equipment with materials, circuit diagrams and spares on show. The event is also supported by leading clubs and societies so practical advice will also be available.

The general categories of equipment and parts to be found fall under the following areas - vintage radio, broadcasting, classic hi-fi, early telephones and communications equipment, gramophones, phonographs, old recordings, film and television equipment (apparently magic lanterns to obsolete studio equipment), other electrical and mechanical antiques - such as music boxes, piano rolls and scientific equipment.

Or if you actually want to get rid of equipment rather than hoarding, it's possible to take a small stand as an individual with prices listed as beginning from around £50.

As mentioned, we've never been but it sounds worthwhile if you're in that part of the UK.

Further information can be found on the web site including how to take a stall - www.bvws.org.uk

National Vintage Communications Fair

Sunday 2nd May & Sunday 10th October 2004

Hall 11, NEC, Birmingham, UK

10.30am to 4pm. Admission £5 (under-14s FREE)

Early Entry (from c.8.30am) £15.

All tickets "on the door".

Admission includes free 32-page 'Collector's Guide' (while stocks last).

Car parking charges (£6) apply.

QUOTABLES

"We are stuck with technology when what we really want is just something that works. How do you recognise something that is still technology? A good clue is if it comes with a manual."

- Douglas Adams, author

STANDARDS : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The US standard railroad gauge (width between the two rails) is 4 feet 8.5 inches.

That's an exceedingly odd number. Why was that gauge used?

Because that's the way they built them in England, and the US railroads were built by English expatriates.

Why did the English build them like that?

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did "they" use that gauge then?

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons which used that wheel spacing. Okay!

Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?

Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So who built those old rutted roads?

The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since.

And the ruts in the roads?

Roman war chariots first formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels.

Since the chariots were made for (or by) Imperial Rome,

Those present at last month's AMPS Meeting with Walter Murch will have heard Walter move seamlessly from a discussion on digital workstation interchange standards to an informed discourse on the development of railway track gauges across Europe and the world, as an example the benefits of maintaining standards of file interchange formats.

This reminded the Newsletter of a light-hearted analysis of the way standards develop chronologically - again using the railways as a starting point. There are several variations of this tale - and we cannot vouch for the accuracy or credit the source of this version - as much as we would wish to do so.



they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet 8.5 inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman war chariot.

Specifications and bureaucracies live forever. So the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's arse came up with it, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses. Thus, we have the answer to the original question.

Now the extra-terrestrial twist to the story...

When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory had to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, the major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's backside. And you wonder why it's so hard to get ahead in this world...

DIGITAL RADIO MICS

JFMG has announced that use of digital radiomicrophones is now permitted in the bands 470 - 854 MHz and 854.25 - 862.00 MHz.

From the UK Interface Requirement, the maximum bandwidth is 200 kHz and the maximum transmitter power is 10 mW erp (may be increased to 50 mW for body-worn equipment). The reference equipment standard is EN 300 422. Wider bandwidth digital radiomicrophones (e.g. to reference standard EN 301 840) are not permitted in these bands.

JFMG website - www.jfmfg.co.uk

JFMG launched it's revamped website in late October and, if you use radio mics, it is worth a look. It now offers a lot of on-line facilities so that users can run their accounts on line, download NoVs, view and purchase carnets, check in-band microphone availability and check on the progress of any applications. Customers may also purchase Shared Radio Mic licenses and renew existing licenses. Additionally, you can request JFMG news updates to be emailed directly to you.

There is also a notice announcing that Ofcom, the new regulator for the communications sector, has published its proposals for introducing spectrum trading into the programme making and special events (PMSE) sector from 2005. Ofcom will be taking over the responsibility for managing radio spectrum from the Radiocommunications Agency in December 2003.

All licences currently issued by JFMG on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency will be affected by the proposals which include the introduction of market-based pricing of spectrum.

Ofcom is seeking views on it's proposals by 13 February 2004.

The full document, including proposals for other radiocommunication sectors is available at :

www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/current/spectrum_trading/index.htm

See the JFMG website for more info - they're of encouraging a wide response to the consultation.

ELIA KAZAN 1909 - 2003

Elia Kazan, film and stage director has died aged 94.

In his early years, he was a stage actor, and in his later years, a best selling author, and in between, a successful theatrical and film director.

He received the Best Director Oscar in 1947 for *Gentleman's Agreement*, and again in 1954 for *On The Waterfront*.

During the 50s and 60s, his pictures included *Viva Zapata*, *Baby Doll*, *Splendour In The Grass*, *A Street car Named Desire*, *A Face In The Crowd*, *East Of Eden* and *The Last Tycoon*.

His pictures made stars of Marlon Brando, James Dean, Natalie Wood and Eve Marie Saint. Nine of his actors won Oscars, 21 were nominated.



A young Kazan with Marlon Brando

He was the founder of the 'Method' technique of acting and founder, with Lee Strasberg, of the 'Actors Studio'.

Kazan blotted his copybook during the McCarthy era, when for fear of being blacklisted in Hollywood, he named eight people, including playwright Clifford Odets, to the House Committee on Unamerican Activities. He insisted, years later, that he bore no guilt as a result of what some saw as betrayal. "There's a moral sadness in hurting



people but I'd rather hurt them a little than hurt myself".

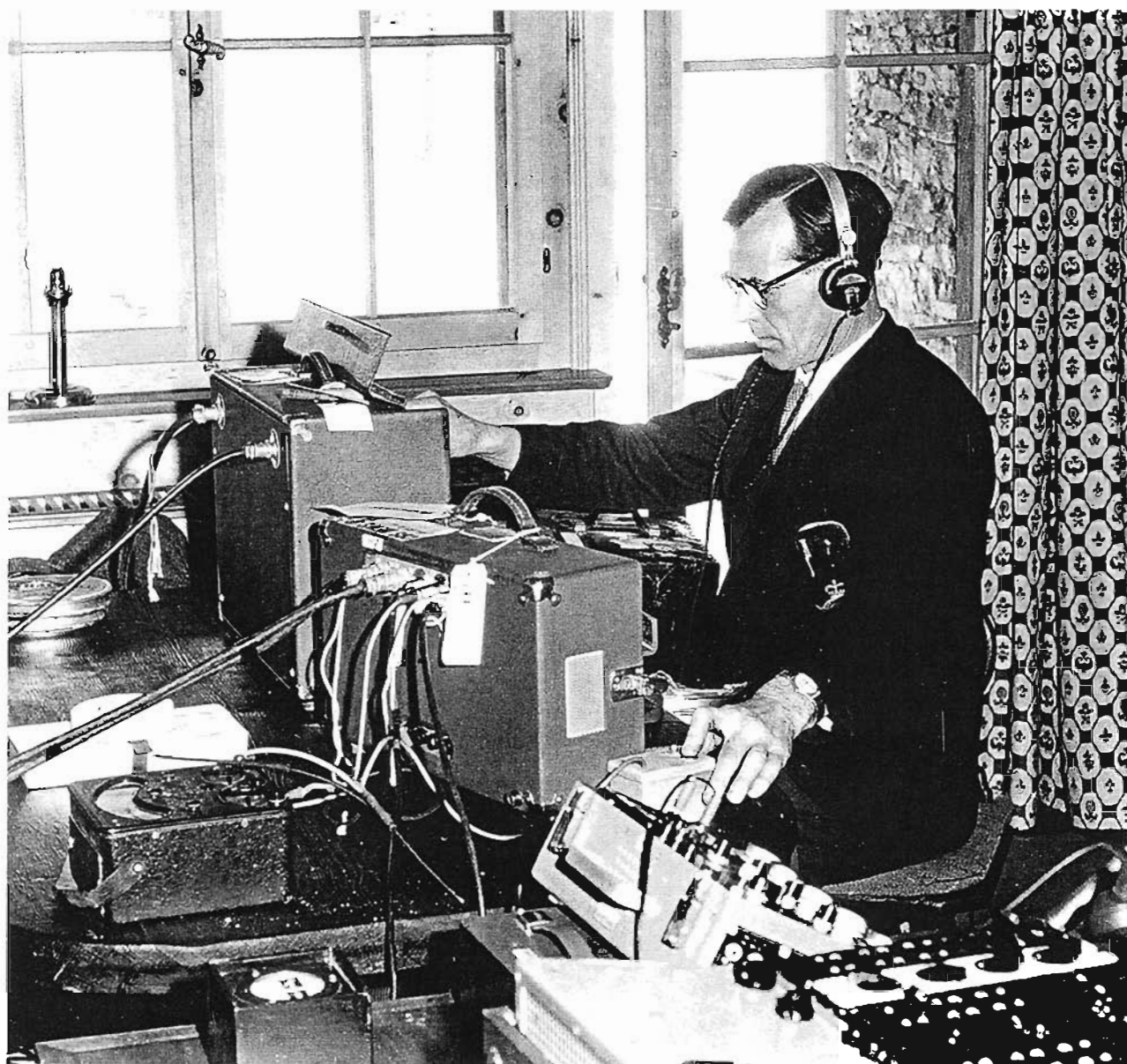
There was quite an outcry in 1999 when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences proposed to honour him for a lifetime of achievement with his third Oscar. The announcement opened old wounds and touched off a painful outcry from many of those who had been blacklisted as communists, or because

they had refused to betray friends and colleagues.

The award went head, and on Awards night, many in the audience withheld their applause.

Personally, although I despise him for being a McCarthyite 'Judas' I have to admit that he made great movies, and when you read his list of credits, you realise that there are few other directors, past or present, who can claim such a list of successful movies.

BOB ALLEN



Fred Hughesdon on location with Westrex 16mm sprocketed magnetic recorder (rear) and mixer /amplifier

Honorary Member Fred Hughesdon died on August 12th, aged 93, in a retirement home at Denham where he'd lived happily for three years after a bad fall in his bungalow nearby.

Fred was, for most of his working life a sound engineer: starting at EMI, and then the RAF, serving in the Radar section. After WW II he joined Pinewood Studios and spent many years working on top feature films. Later Fred moved to Location Sound Facilities as the late John Hales' right-hand man, at a time when this was probably the first British company to be set up to record sound independently of the studio system. His sincerity and honesty made him ideal for this.

I worked with Fred on many features in various parts of the world, a situation in which he was very capable and a credit to any crew. He frequently helped out when and wherever it was needed, from starting a temperamental genny, to repairing a script girl's radio, and always with good grace and a smile.

Fred also became a production mixer on several films, such as *Sanders Of The River* (the 1963 remake), and *The Face Of Fu Manchu* (1965). Even after retirement he occasionally serviced equipment in his own home for certain people.

His dear wife, Ada, predeceased him, but he leaves two sons, Malcolm and David.

Fred was a good friend and a good man, rightly described by those at the nursing home as "Always a gentleman". He contributed much to our industry.

JOHN BROWNAGE, AMPS.

AMPS new logo - the inside info

AMPS new logo was first shown at the 2003 AGM and received enthusiastically by the attendees. Over the course of the year, it has been introduced gradually across most of the Association's printed and promotional material, the website, used extensively at The Production Show, and by the time of the next AGM will have virtually replaced the original design.



There were many good reasons for wanting to develop a new logo although the original 'church-maze' had served AMPS well for nearly 14 years. As the Association developed we found that it wasn't representing us as positively as we might wish. The clever integration of the letters A,M,P,S, was distinctive but didn't say who we were without explanation. With our aims of promoting AMPS more widely, through exhibition stands and publications etc, we needed a logo that would be more explanatory. Also the height of the original design played against us because when placed with other logos, designers tend to adjust their heights so that they are all of an average size which generally left our logo very small.

So a landscape design was needed with clear lettering. The move to lower case characters helped create a chunkier appearance without the

troublesome standalone capital 'A'. Arial Black was selected as a typeface because it is naturally weighty, can be used large or very small and still remain recognisable, plus it's available as a standard typeface on most computers. Reversing the letters out of a block of colour adds more of a punch. The logo shape also allowed the full name of the Association to be written underneath for when that is desirable.



The complete process took nearly six months of discussion and the studying of differing designs in Council meetings. It was decided to keep a very similar red colour to the original logo to maintain a sense on continuity although when used small with AMPS spelt out in full underneath, the colour is darkened slightly to increase legibility.

So far it has worked well but all the design elements used with it on letterheads and publications etc also have to change, and the slow introduction has allowed this to be addressed.

The Designers - Jim Betteridge & Keith Spencer-Allen



South African production mixer and AMPS member, Nico Luow (left in pic), visited Shepperton in the summer to meet up with the sound editors and re-recording crew who were starting pre-mixes on a movie he mixed in South Africa entitled *Stander*. He also took the opportunity to visit Brian Simmons (right in pic) on the set of *The Life And Death Of Peter Sellers*, and John Midgley. Nico was also the lucky recipient of an invite to the Rycote weekend which gave him the chance to meet many more industry people.

DON'T FORGET THE AMPS AGM AND SUSTAINING MEMBERS SHOW

**11am, Sunday 8th February 2004
Pinewood Studios'
Green Room & Gatsby Suite**

Coffee and biscuits from 10.30am

**Meet the Sustaining Members and
their product displays**

Buffet lunch

Make a note of the time and place

More details to follow