

REMEMBRANCES of JOHN'S LIFE JOURNEY

THE EARLY YEARS

John was born in 1921, many years ago in Doncaster in the West Riding of Yorkshire. John was an only child to his parents, Arthur and Hilda Aldred. His father ran a dental practice and one of his patients was to later to help steer his future career path.

John (our father) was very proud of his large family of **three** children, **thirteen** grandchildren and **twenty-seven** great grandchildren. We have had many family gatherings, parties and weddings and reunions with many happy memories of the times spent together, especially in the last 15 years.

He had so many stories he told us both individually and on big family occasions, but what to include and what to leave out!!

Aged 7 he was taken to the Doncaster cinema hall to see 'Simba The Lion' a silent film that had music and sound effects instead of orchestras in the pit.

Aged 8 he cycled alone into Doncaster without parent's knowledge or permission to see a film musical for an old 6p. He decided that day this would be his career path. He then saved his 12s 6p (62p) pocket money towards a hand operated, battery slide projector.

Aged 13 (in 1934) he went to a boarding school in Ryde where he became known as '**The Young Marconi**' having built a three valve radio. There he incurred the displeasure of the headmaster having been allowed to film the school sports day. He turned the 16mm cine camera upside down, then he showed the film of boys diving out of the water back onto the diving board. The boys were most amused but the headmaster wasn't.

Age 13 on a visit to a film studio he noticed all the sound was out of synchronisation to pictures. This was where his interest in 'problem solving' was born.

Aged 15 he was invited out on the headmasters speedboat out into the Solent at Ryde to film in 16mm the Queen Mary coming out of Southampton on her maiden voyage.

John was **aged only 19** when his father sadly passed away, aged 54, causing financial disaster to the family finances. His mother Hilda went back to live with

her parents James and Alice in Ryde IOW. John (our father) had to move into digs at what was a very low ebb in his personal life. He only had a bicycle and £50 in the Post Office. This is when he motivated himself to throw all his efforts and put many hours into his work to further his career.

CAREER

There were no technical courses, degrees in Film or Broadcasting sound, no formal training when he started his career, so he looked to apprenticeship.

Aged 16 he joined Shepperton Film Studios on £1 per week and in his very first week came out **on strike** after joining the union.

Age 17 he worked as a Sound Assistant Operator at Denham Film Studios. Here he had to very quickly load all the Film magazines loaded with photographic Sound Film and distribute round the site to all the film stages on a large tricycle. This speed of magazine loading was to help later in his career. He was **the fastest**.

Aged 20 (in 1940) he bought his first sports car – an open top Triumph Super 7 from a dealer in Uxbridge for £20 to get to work. Road Tax 25 shillings / Car Insurance £4.

He diligently learnt all from first principles, innovating and strived for excellence that delighted the film directors. He helped make the UK be the best place for film making in the 1950's and laid down UK's reputation that is still growing today.

WORLD WAR 2

He was called up to Join the Army in the Royal Sussex Regiment and wait for his 'planned' calling. John's work was viewed as essential war work.

In the Army during WW2 he was one of the very few that was actually 'demobbed' twice. He was needed as a civilian to complete the sound at Denham Film Studios on one of the propaganda films about the war effort. Although he was really in the Army he was earning a civilian wage that was donated somewhere, borrowed an Army Sound truck to get the job done!

General Dwight D Eisenhower – Supreme Allied Commander said in April 1945 "The world must know what happened and never forget"

AFPU

During WW2 he was in the Army Film Photographic Unit (AFPU) along with Crown Films making propaganda films at the requisitioned Pinewood Film Studios.

AFPU was formed in 1941 with men where they were looking for self reliance, initiative, courage and extraordinary skills. Twenty-six were killed on active service. AFPU is still an untold story after 75 years. Only 4 now survive.

They initially tried to dub simulated sound in the studio onto silent films taken across Europe by the AFPU cameramen with their clockwork cameras.

How mad it was to have silent / mute cine films as a record of a very noisy war. He was subsequently sent on assignment to North West Europe for 6 months to record all the real sounds of war.

He was able to acquire a free rental / loan of a Western Electric (variable) 'F' channel camera sound recorder with crates of batteries. No spares. These were more reliable and allowed longer recordings than the BBC at that time. The BBC and News companies were also banned from Europe at that time. They were given a (4 ton) Ford utility truck which was immediately converted into a fully mobile recording studio.

They were issued with 'Go Anywhere' paper passes – "Nobody shall hinder these men in the execution of their duty" These were 'solid gold' and signed by General Eisenhower. These were the most marvellous thing to have in their pocket.

Out in the theatre of war he said he was not scared or frightened but had a unique job to do. Thread that photographic sound film – "Keep Calm and Carry On recording". He could unload / load / lace up in >20 seconds!

His Landing Craft crashed into the Mulberry Harbour but with equipment intact he was told to report to Ltnt Peter Handford in Brussels who would as a trio record all the sounds of war in their assignment. When he ran out of recording film stock he somehow acquired some German AGFA stock, carried on making recordings – but they were very confused back home. **How did they do that?**

In a German village he had just driven the truck into a garage, to charge the batteries, set up a microphone and put headphones on when an 80mm mortar shell hit the house. He said that was one of his best and most distinctive recordings he remembered. [No 187]

In September 1944 the **1st Canadian Army** liberated **Dieppe**, then **Calais** where their elation took a bit of a blow. The **APFU** members John Aldred and Peter Carpenter (their driver) had already reclaimed the city 24 hours earlier. They had to convince the Canadians that they weren't Germans in disguise with their 'Go Anywhere' passes. **History is now corrected.**

He joined the RAF for a day where he recorded inside flying Wellington Bomber aircraft. He joined the UK Royal Navy for day, only to record being depth charged several times in a Navy submarine in a Scottish Loch. Upon surfacing they found many dead fish for lunch!

The fantastic sound library that Sgnt JBA + Lnt Peter Handford diligently captured of WW2, is now in the custody and stewardship of the **Imperial War Museum**. This library has been used in many subsequent cinema films and documentaries today,

"An extraordinary story of an ordinary man who didn't make history but was there to record sound for films of it happening".

He was the very last to leave the AFPU and he turned 'out the lights'.

VE day May 1945 - he was there in Trafalgar Square, London. He filmed one of the greatest days in our history only to have his cine camera stolen from a locker room.

AFTER THE WAR

During his long career in the Film Industry he was a production, music and dubbing mixer for all the major film studios, Shepperton, Pinewood, Denham, Elstree and MGM. He was much respected and admired in his field, for his work with all aspects of film sound. His full career in Film Sound spanned almost 50 years working on 57 films and music on 19 productions.

He worked on '**The Guns of Navarone**' – as Sound Mixer using Magnetic Tape for the first time and this film had a Royal Premier at Odeon Leicester Square where he sat just behind the Queen and of course enjoying the best sound.

Two other timeless films he worked on during his career that we talked about were '**Lawrence of Arabia**' and as Sound Mixer on the original '**The Italian Job**' where he became a member of 'The Self Preservation Society'.

For filming '**The Italian Job**' he spent 3 days in Kilmainham Gaol and 2 days in Cruagh Cemetery (both outside Dublin) filming Noel Coward (as Mr Bridger).

In June 2019 I was very privileged on his behalf, to go to the 50th Anniversary screening of the film inside the Mini factory hosted by Matthew Field and meeting both the producer Michael Deeley and David Salamone who procured all the cars in the film and drove the red Mini Cooper 'S'.

ACHIEVEMENTS

He was nominated twice for 'Best Sound' at the Academy Oscars. In 1970 for 'Anne of a Thousand Days' and 1972 for 'Mary Queen of Scots'. He never actually won an Oscar.

Letter of thanks from many film directors - 'Head of MGM Sound in America' wrote '**Far from the Madding Crowd**' "very impressed with sound quality and balance between music effects and dialogue – the best I have heard from an English studio".

He also worked on the sound for the world's very first IMAX film called '**North of Superior**' whilst working for a year in Toronto, Canada.

He was a Past President and Fellow of the 'British Kinematograph Sound and Television Society' from 1980 - 1982. Also a Fellow of 'The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers'

He also authored a book '**Manual of Sound Recording**' and worked on British Standards with '**Dolby Laboratories**' on the new standards covering Dolby sound systems.

IN CONCLUSION (ENDING)

Always a gentleman, old fashioned values, very knowledgeable, shared knowledge, helped many others in their careers, could be intensely private but

would happily talk to anyone. Hundreds of conversations, then a friendship was born.

He worked on many true classic films, so many **On Location** stories that we could write a book!

He was an **Analogue** man who lived into the **Digital** Age.

Thank you for helping 57 Cinema Films not be the Silent Ones.

Epilogue compiled by Brian Aldred (son)