

Tjitte de Vries

Arthur Melbourne-Cooper (1874-1961). A Documentation of Sources Concerning A British Film Pioneer

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Arthur Melbourne-Cooper (1874-1961)

A Documentation of Sources Concerning A British Film Pioneer

In the past twenty five years, together with my wife M/s Ati Mul, we have researched the life and work of British film pioneer Arthur Melbourne-Cooper (1874-1961) and his Alpha Trading Company at St Albans. We have also investigated many of the claims by Cooper's eldest daughter Audrey Wadowska (1909-1982) concerning the films made by her father and many counter-claims of disputed films.

It is quite amazing how much evidential material is available about this very early film pioneer who witnessed the birth of cinematography, becoming an independent cinematographer for twenty years. It is also surprising that this film pioneer is now almost completely forgotten.

From 1956, Audrey Wadowska researched her father's career. This resulted in enormous heaps of documents, photocopies, photographs, newspaper cuttings, magazine articles, notes and manuscripts, films and film stills, audio tape and cassette recordings and numerous copies of most of these items. Thanks to Cooper's daughter there exists in the province of film history a unique legacy: Cooper's own voice on 17 reel-to-reel audio tapes. This archive also deals with British film pioneer Birt Acres (1854-1918), who employed Cooper from 1894 till 1901.

When Audrey's husband Jan Wadowski (1908-1996) died, he left this unsorted estate to his friend, local historian Christopher Wilkinson of Boreham Wood. During the last eight years, he as executor handed over to us boxes full of material to sort out and to archive. Much original material has gone to the St Albans Museum. The film collection will eventually go the East Anglian Film Archive at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. Doubles in this collection will go to the Filmmuseum in Amsterdam.

We are numbering all the material and describing it in a database, filing it in functionally coloured archive ledgers and boxes. The following documentation¹ is an overview of the available material. We divided the material in two sections:

1. Primary sources:
 - a. concerning the film pioneer himself and his family: contemporary sources; Cooper's recorded interviews (oral and written history); films;
 - b. concerning his partners, friends, colleagues etc.: personal notes;
2. Secondary material:
 - a. concerning Arthur Melbourne Cooper himself and his family: later sources; catalogues and historical surveys; unpublished manuscripts; filmography;
 - b. concerning his partners, friends, colleagues: audio tapes and cassettes; correspondence; photographs; notes and papers;
3. The results of our own research: personal archive.

1.a. Primary sources, concerning Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, his life, his achievements, and his family

From primary sources like contemporary articles, advertisements etc. we can clearly identify Arthur Melbourne-Cooper as the proprietor of the Alpha Trading Company, also called Alpha Cinematograph Works, established in 1901 until 1913 in St Albans, first at Bedford Park, then at 14, Alma Road. Cooper then established a production company called Heron Films Ltd., and in 1913 a second company called Kinema Industries Ltd. at Warwick Court, High Holborn, that took over his Alpha Trading Company as a going concern.

Here follows a tentative summing-up of printed material collected in green archive ledgers.

Contemporary Printed Material (1897-1915)

In 1897, Melbourne-Cooper is advertising moving picture performances in seaside resort Scarborough.

In February 1903, Cooper was invited to give a Command Performance at Chatsworth for the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. Cooper used the review in the *Daily Telegraph* of this show in a leaflet to advertise an event at the Corn Exchange in Hertford on February 16th and 17th, 1904. This invited picture goes to a »Grand Variety Entertainment and Exhibition of Animated Pictures by the Alpha Cinematograph [...] Exhibited at Chatsworth House in honour of His Majesty the King«.

For 1905 we have an incomplete film catalogue, *A List of Alpha Cinematograph Films* by the »Alpha Cinematograph Works« with synopses of se-

ven film titles numbered from 129 to 157, suggesting that it offered information of at least 29 films and that more catalogues like this were published previously. The catalogue refers to the »Warwick Trading Company« at Warwick Court, High Holborn as the distributing agent for the films in this catalogue.

In 1906, the Alpha Trading Company was advertising moving pictures of the coronation of King Haakon of Norway in the German trade paper *Der Artist*.

In the same year, Melbourne-Cooper and his Alpha Trading Company are named in an agreement with other film companies to establish the Kinematograph Manufacturers' Association of Great Britain, KMA.²

On March 5, 1908 in *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, on a page headed »Second-Hand Films« [sic], the Alpha Trading Co., »wholesale Film Manufacturers, Bedford Park, St Albans« advertises: »Have several soiled copies of each the following subjects cheap to clear« [sic]. 18 different film titles varying in lengths from 100 to 550 feet are offered for sale.

On September 18, 1908, the trade magazine *The Bioscope*, on two illustrated pages, gives a »Special Interview with Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper« under the headline »The Alpha Trading Co. Open New Works at St Albans«. The first illustration shows the interior of Cooper's Alpha Picture Palace, the second his portrait and the third »Part of the Works and Offices« of his new studio at Alma Road.

In 1908, Cooper opened his Alpha Picture Palace (»Sole lessee: The Alpha Trading Co.«) in St Albans and from 1909 he published almost every week in the *Herts Advertiser* its programme. On several occasions the newspaper publishes reviews of the film shows at the Picture Palace.

From 2nd to 4th February 1909, Cooper was one of the representatives from 7 European countries at the European Convention of Film Makers and Publishers in Paris. His Alpha Trading Company is on top of the list of the 34 participating companies.

On March 25th, 1909, Cooper and his Alpha Trading Company are named in the trade magazine *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* because he has become a member of the Executive Committee of the KMA.

On March 13th, 1909, the newspaper *Herts Advertiser & St Albans Times* publishes a long interview with Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper under the headline »How Bioscope Records Are Made«. The article describes the Alpha Picture Palace. It mentions »an excellent studio [...] for the purpose of picture-making«. And it gives a description of a puppet animation picture that is in production, NOAH'S ARK (1909). A number of sports films get special mention: the LINCOLNSHIRE HANDICAP (1903) and the GRAND NATIONAL (1903) that were shown on the same evening at The Empire Theatre in London, and a LIFEBOAT DEMONSTRATION (date and place unknown).

The Kinematograph Weekly of May 3rd, 1956 publishes a photograph of the British Committee at the European Convention of Film Makers and Pu-

blishers in Paris in February 1909 on which Melbourne-Cooper can be seen next to famous pioneers like Méliès, Hepworth, Gaumont, Paul, Williamson, Pathé and others.

Company papers show that Cooper, in 1909, made an effort to go public with his two Alpha Picture Palaces in St Albans and Letchworth. The St Albans Alpha Picture Palaces Ltd. was no success. The offers were under subscribed. He eventually lost his cinemas.

From 1911 onwards, R. Prieur and Co. Ltd of 40, Gerrard Street, London, is acting as distributing agent for Alpha pictures. He advertises regularly in *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*. Many titles are re-issues of previous Alpha productions. Altogether, the Alpha Films advertisements mention several hundred titles.

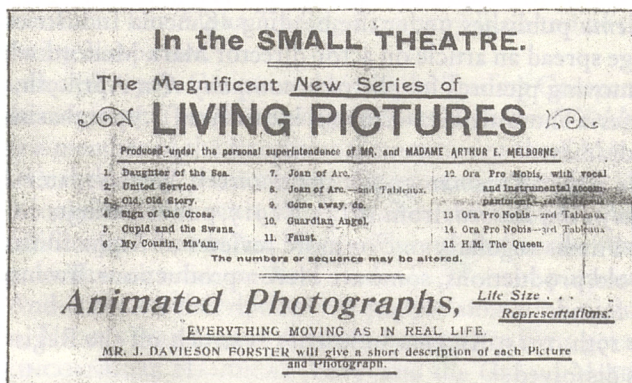
The *Bioscope* of February 20th, 1912 carries an advertisement of Heron Films, the company that Cooper shortly before had established with a business partner Andrew Heron, with the headline: »Something absolutely unique. BLOWING BUBBLES. One of the prettiest films ever taken. Nothing like it seen before. Order now. Get on our mailing list. Released April 4th, length 420 ft.«

In *The Bioscope* of March 6th, 1913, the name of Alpha is mentioned in the section New Companies. Cooper, then living at Manor Park, Lee, Kent (now Lewisham), together with Andrew Heron of Chingford, Essex are forming Kinema Industries Limited with a nominal capital of $\frac{3}{4}$ 2.000 that will take over the business of film manufacturers carried on as the Alpha Trading Company. The company papers record Cooper as »Kinematographer« and Heron as »Gentleman«.

The trade magazine *The Cinema*, on March 19th, 1913, publishes »A chat with Mr. Melbourne-Cooper« about Kinema Industries Ltd. In the same issue *The Cinema* publishes under the heading »Kinema Industries Artistes« on a two-page spread an article on actor-director Mark Melford who is going to produce moving pictures for the new company. On April 9th, 1913, *The Cinema* writes a short article: »Kinema Industries [...] purchasing both comedies and dramas.«

The trade paper *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, later *Kinematograph Monthly Film Record*, from 1913 till 1915, publishes in its column »The Story of the Films« regularly one or more reviews of Alpha films. Many are re-issues of old productions, some are Heron productions. Twenty different titles can be found.

On June 29th, 1915, Kinema Industries is struck off the Register and the Company is dissolved.



Programme cover of entertainments in The Exhibition Buildings at Scarborough in 1897. »The Magnificent New Series of Living Pictures«. Arthur's sister Bertha accompanied him. His name was misspelled possibly because of misreading of the telegram with all the programme details

THE

Alpha Cinematograph Works,

MANUFACTURERS AND EXHIBITORS OF
THE ALPHA CINEMATOGRAPH FILMS,

Bedford Park, Beaconsfield Road, St. Albans,

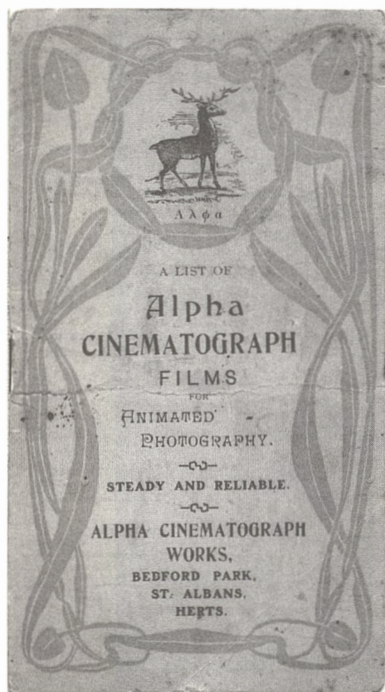
Provide Exhibitions of Animated Photographs suitable for
Bazaars, Schools, Drawing Room, Evening Parties, etc.

THE Alpha Cinematograph Works beg to intimate to their numerous Patrons, Ladies and Gentlemen interested in organising Bazaars, Garden Parties, Evening Concerts, and other Variety Entertainments, that they are now booking dates for exhibitions during the coming season. The Alpha is worked on an entirely new principle, being free from the unpleasant flicker so well known to other Cinematographs; it has gained the reputation of being the most perfect ever before the public.

In order to keep pace with the constantly increasing desire for local or private photographs, we have made extensive arrangements for supplying clients with ~~Animated Photographs~~ of SPECIAL EVENTS for Exhibition, the SAME DAY.

The Daily Telegraph says:—"One of the principal features of the entertainment, provided at Chatsworth, was the Animated Pictures. As a surprise, the operators Photographed one morning the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and several of the house party, showing the picture in the ball-room the same evening; a record in such matters in connection with a private house."

A picture programme for animated pictures in 1904 by the Alpha Cinematograph proudly refers to Cooper's royal command performance at Chatsworth House in 1903



Cover of an Alpha moving picture catalogue of 1905, possibly a third edition

Das beste Haus für englische Films!

6477

NOTIZ.

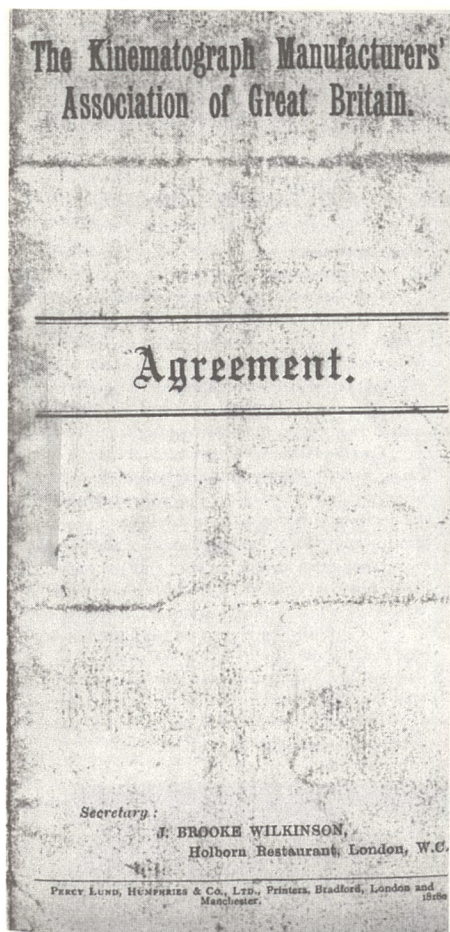
Die Krönung von König Haakon.

Wir haben Einrichtungen getroffen, Kopien direkt von Trondhjem zu senden.
Aufträge werden der Reihe nach erledigt und sollten sofort aufgegeben werden um früheste Lieferung zu ermöglichen.

Eine beschreibende Broschüre gratis auf Wunsch von der

Alpha Trading Co.
Spezialgeschäft für lebende Photographien,
Bedford Park, St. Albans (England).
Telegraphische Adresse: Alpha, St. Albans.

Advertisement in the German trade paper *Der Artist*, edition Düsseldorf, 24th June 1906, offering moving pictures of the coronation of King Haakon of Norway, filmed for Alpha by Cooper's assistant Anton Nöggerath Jr.



Agreement for the establishing of the Kinematograph Manufacturers' Association of Great Britain by the leading film producers

The Alpha Trading Company, in 1908 moving from its studios in Bedford Park to new and bigger studios at Alma Road, St Albans, is offering »soiled copies ... cheap to clear«, in: *The Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, March 5, 1908

| THE ALPHA TRADING CO., Wholesale Film Manufacturers, Bedford Park, St. Albans. | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|
| Have several soiled copies of each the following subjects cheap to clear. | | | |
| Title. | | | ft. |
| When Mistress took her Holiday | .. | ... | 400 |
| Happy Man | ... | ... | 185 |
| Youth repaid | ... | ... | 235 |
| A Boys Half-holiday | ... | ... | 38 |
| Between One and Two a.m. | ... | ... | 37 |
| The Woes of a Married Man | ... | ... | 400 |
| The Modern Pirates | ... | ... | 50 |
| Levasso Waterfalls... | ... | ... | 10 |
| The Luck of Life | ... | ... | 55 |
| Held to Ransom | ... | ... | 56 |
| Our new Pillarbox | ... | ... | 32 |
| Who's to Blame | ... | ... | 31 |
| Oh that Molar | ... | ... | 21 |
| Lottie's Pancakes | ... | ... | 34 |
| The Wily Fiddler | ... | ... | 35 |
| Grandfathers tormenters | ... | ... | 15 |
| In Quest of Health... | ... | ... | 47 |
| Seen at the Chiroprapist | .. | .. | 31 |

THE ALPHA TRADING CO.

Open New Works at St. Albans.

SPECIAL INTERVIEW WITH MR. A. MELBOURNE-COOPER.

Of the thousands of readers of *The Bioscope*, few perhaps are aware that the little town of St. Albans in Hertfordshire, is the home of one of the most enterprising firms in the film-picture-business, the Alpha Trading Co.

On a recent visit we were afforded an opportunity to view the whole of the Company's various premises and to note the extraordinary degree of perfection which characterises every department of the business.

To begin with, the position of the Alpha Company is unique. They are manufacturers and producers *for the trade only*, that is to say, they do no retail business. The entire organization is devoted to the carrying out of ideas and the production of films for various large firms in different parts of the world. Many a "publisher" of film subjects takes full advantage of the exceptional facilities offered by the Alpha Co., and it is not surprising to learn that the establishment is kept at full pressure almost all the year round.

We were fortunate in having, as guide, the Managing Director, Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper, to

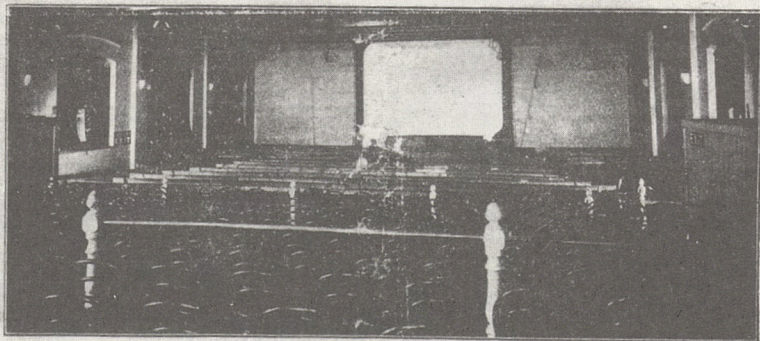
whose knowledge, energy and foresight the success of the company is, in a great measure, due.

The first point that attracts attention is the immense area of land occupied by the works, offices, studios and outdoor staging grounds, totalling upwards of two acres. Of course, in a business of this kind there is no need to indulge in the luxury of architectural magnificence, everything being arranged on a strictly utilitarian basis.

The foundation of all good film-making is, of course, ample staging accommodation. In this direction the Alpha people are extremely fortunate, for not only have they an almost unlimited choice of outdoor positions, but they also have their own completely-fitted theatre, which, with its minor halls, provides facilities for the *mise-en-scene* of four or five important productions, simultaneously.

But good staging needs good plots, and it is in this direction that the St. Albans firm excels. They employ a number of experienced authors and these in turn are backed up by thoroughly efficient acting.

They are also prepared to purchase good plots from independent sources.



The Picture Palace, St. Albans.

A »Special interview with Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper« in the trade magazine *The Bioscope*, in 1908, illustrated with photographs of the new Alpha Picture Palace and the new studios and offices of the Alpha Trading Company. »A feature worthy to note is that the lower priced seats are in front and the better at the back«

The photographic equipment is of the most up-to-date description, apparatus by the leading makers, both for studio and outdoor work being the best obtainable.

The more mechanical departments for developing, printing, toning, perforating, etc., are all under the direction of experts, and the rapidity with which the work is turned out bears eloquent testimony to the admirable "system" which pervades the whole establishment.

Touching the question of rapid output, we would remark that "rush work" is quite a speciality here. It is no uncommon occurrence for an order for films, received by the morning's post, to be executed the same day.

We have already indicated that nothing in the way of film production comes amiss to the Alpha Company. Here is a tip. Whenever a difficult job arises, send to St. Albans. If Mr. Melbourne-Cooper and his merry men can't master the situation, it is more than likely that nobody else can.

The Theatre mentioned above is not, of course, utilised solely for picture taking. It is open every evening as a popular all-picture house, and is the favourite place of amusement of the district. It has a seating capacity of 800, and a feature worthy of note is that the lower priced places are in front and the better ones at the back. This arrangement was somewhat resented at first by the patrons of the higher priced seats, but when they found that the specially-raised floor gave them a



Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper.

better view than could be got from the front, they appreciated the innovation. The operator's "box" does not stand in the usual place inside the auditorium. It is a roomy apartment built out as an annexe, and therefore affords immunity from accident as well as from interference by the public. There are also an operator's room and manager's office. Altogether a very convenient and attractive hall.

The accompanying illustrations, from photographs, scarcely do justice to the subjects. The view of the offices and studios is taken from the old English garden, and the interior of the Picture Place gives a fair idea of the size of the building. The portrait of Mr. A. Melbourne-Cooper, the moving spirit of the Alpha Company, will be interesting to his many friends in the profession.



Part of the Works and Offices.

ST. ALBANS PICTURE PALACE
 London Road.

TWICE NIGHTLY - 7-9.
SPECIAL MATINEE SATURDAY, 3 p.m.

NEXT WEEK (Special)
THE
SLEEPALLDAY FIRE BRIGADE

2^D. 4^D. 6^D.

BOOK YOUR SEATS. EARLY DOOR THROUGH LOUNGE.
 Specially cooled and ventilated by Electric Fans.
CYCLES STORED FREE during performance.
 Sole Lessees: **THE ALPHA TRADING CO.**
 Phone: 182 ST. ALBANS.

One of the regular advertisements in the *Herts Advertiser* and *St. Albans Times* for the Picture Palace, this time with a special for next week **SLEEPALLDAY FIRE BRIGADE**, an Alpha production

This Prospectus has been filed with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies.

The Subscription List will open on Friday, the 22nd April, 1910, and will close for Town and Country on or before Friday, the 29th April, 1910, at 4 p.m.

St. Albans Alpha Picture Palaces,
LIMITED.
(Incorporated under the Companies (Consolidation) Act, 1908)

CAPITAL - - - £5,000,
 Divided into 5,000 Shares of £1 each.

Of which 1,500 will be issued as fully paid in part payment of the purchase price, and
3,500 ARE NOW ISSUED FOR SUBSCRIPTION AT PAR,

PAYABLE:

2s. per Share on Application;
 8s. " " Allotment;

And the balance in Calls not exceeding 5s. per Share, at intervals of at least Three months.

Directors.
 ARTHUR MELBOURNE COOPER, Manufacturer, 14, Alma Road, St. Albans.
 HENRY F. LAST, Accountant, Goodmayes, Essex.
 JOHN MITCHELL MACLAFFITY, Clothier and Leather Merchant, 18, Market Place, St. Albans.

Bankers.
 LONDON CITY & MIDLAND BANK, LIMITED (ST. ALBANS BRANCH).

auditor.
 WILLIAM MERCER, Chartered Accountant, 44, Bedford Row, London, W.C.

Solicitors.
 SPARKS & BUSSELL, 52, Walbrook, London, E.C.

Secretary.
 A. STEWART BURNS.

Offices.
 14, ALMA ROAD, ST. ALBANS.

PROSPECTUS.

This Company has been formed to acquire as a going concern that branch or department of the business of the Alpha Trading Company known as the Picture Palace.

The Alpha Trading Company has been engaged in the business of cinematograph film manufactures for the past eight years, and has established a world-wide reputation.

With this prospectus, Cooper goes public with his two Alpha Picture Palaces



Arthur Melbourne-Cooper was with his Alpha Trading Company a participant of the European Convention of Film makers and Publishers from 2nd to 4th February 1909 in Paris. He can be seen at the far right of the middle row



The English delegation together with several French participants at the Paris Convention of 1909 on another photograph. Cooper can be seen in the middle row at the far left, right behind Harold Hough (with hat)



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THE COMPANIES (CONSOLIDATION) ACT, 1908.

COMPANY LIMITED BY SHARES.

Memorandum of Association

— OF —

KINEMA INDUSTRIES, LIMITED.

REGISTERED
22541
17 FEB 1913

1. The name of the Company is "KINEMA INDUSTRIES, Limited".
2. The registered office of the Company will be situate in England.
3. The objects for which the Company is established are:—
 - (1) To enter into and carry into effect with such (if any) modifications or alterations as may be agreed upon but subject as to such modifications or alterations agreed on prior to the statutory meeting to the approval of such meeting an agreement in the terms of the draft identified by the signature thereon of Mr. Arthur Frederick Melbourne Cooper for the purchase of the business, assets and undertaking of film manufacturers carried on under the style of "The Alpha Trading Company", at 28, Manor Park, Lee, in the County of Kent.
 - (2) To carry on the business of manufacturers, producers and repairers of films for use in cinematograph theatres, dealers in and hirers of films and all materials and apparatus used in connection with such business.

aw

The establishment of Kinema Industries Ltd. in 1913.
The new company is subscribed by Andrew Heron, Gentleman, and A. F. M. Cooper, Kinematographer

WE, the several persons whose names and addresses are subscribed, are desirous of being formed into a Company in pursuance of this Memorandum of Association, and we respectively agree to take the number of shares in the capital of the Company set opposite our respective names.

| NAMES, ADDRESSES AND DESCRIPTIONS OF SUBSCRIBERS. | Number of Shares taken by each Subscriber. |
|---|--|
| <i>Andrew Horon</i> <i>Tweddale</i> <i>Warren Road</i> <i>Chingford Essex</i> <i>Geothman</i> | <i>one</i> |
| <i>A J M Cooper</i> <i>26 Madison Park</i> <i>Lee S.E.</i> <i>Kinematographer</i> | <i>one</i> |

DATED the 17 day of February, 1913.

WITNESS to the above signatures:—

H. Pumphrey Jr.
14 Paternoster Row
Solicitor *Elb.*

[24.]

"THE COMPANIES (CONSOLIDATION) ACT, 1908."

(8 Edw. VII., c. 69.)

All communications to be addressed to
The Registrar of Joint Stock Companies,
Companies Registration Office,
SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON, W.C.

Remittances must be made out in favour
of "The Commissioners of Inland Revenue,"
and be crossed "Bank of England Inland
Revenue a/c." Amounts of 1/- and upwards
must not be remitted in stamps.
The following number and letter should be
quoted in the reply :-

127222

COMPANIES REGISTRATION OFFICE,

SOMERSET HOUSE,

LONDON, W.C.,

29 JUN 1915

SIR,

PURSUANT to s. 242 (3) of the Companies (Consolidation) Act, 1908,
I hereby give you Notice that at the expiration of three months from the date
hereof, the Name of your Company will, unless cause is shown to the contrary,
be struck off the Register and the Company will be Dissolved.

It will, however, be seen on reference to the 5th Sub-section of Clause 242
of the Act above-mentioned, that this Dissolution is subject to the proviso that
the liability (if any) of every Director, Managing Officer, and Member of the
Company shall continue and may be enforced as if the Company had not been
dissolved.

I am,

SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

P. Thompson

Registrar of Joint Stock Companies.

The Secretary (or Manager),

Kinema Industries
Company, Limited.

2000/4/13—[4267] 2000 10/18+ G & S 1020



Kinema Industries Ltd., in June 1915, is struck off the Register

Cooper's voice (1956-1961)

Most interesting are the tapes with the voice of Melbourne-Cooper. There are 17 tapes with Cooper made between July 1956 and Easter 1961, totalling more than 14 hours. A tentative count from 14 tape transcriptions shows Cooper 251 times mentioning a title or synopsis of a film that he made, naming 145 different films.

The most important tape is an 18 minute BBC-interview of July 11th, 1958 conducted by National Film Archive curator Ernest Lindgren. He interviews Cooper extensively about his early years as a young assistant to Birt Acres and later on his career as an independent film maker.

The first tape recording was made at Southend in July 1956 during a visit of Melbourne-Cooper to Sydney Birt Acres, son of Birt Acres. It lasts 50 minutes.

A month later Audrey and Jan Wadowski took a tape recorder to Coton to interview her father during a session of 15 minutes. At the end of that year, a tape recorder was used when Cooper and his wife are celebrating Christmas with their children and grandchildren at the home of their youngest daughter Mrs Ursula Constance Messenger at Clapham.



After almost half a century Cooper (right) meets again with his old friend and assistant Stanley Collier, at Aldeburgh, 20th July 1958

On July 20th, 1958, two tapes of 90 minutes in total were made of Cooper's visit to Aldeburgh where he meets with his old friend and associate Stanley Collier.

From 1958 till Easter 1961, Audrey Wadowska made another 4 tape recordings, 3 hours and 52 minutes in total. During two visits in August 1960, 4 tapes were made when John Grisdale interviewed Cooper at Coton. In the Summer of 1960, honorary secretary of the British Fairground Association, Bert Barker visits Cooper at the home of Audrey and Jan Wadowski in London. Two tapes of 130 minutes in total were made.

The 17 tapes with Cooper form a unique document. Cooper is very clear and decisive in his memories. Several times he sharply corrects his daughter. Cooper deals self-confidently with his early career and remembers numerous plots and story lines of the pictures that he made. We consider these Cooper tapes as unique primary source material.



Audrey Wadowska, in the Winter of 1957, interviewing her father on his film pioneering days. These interviews were recorded on a number of occasions

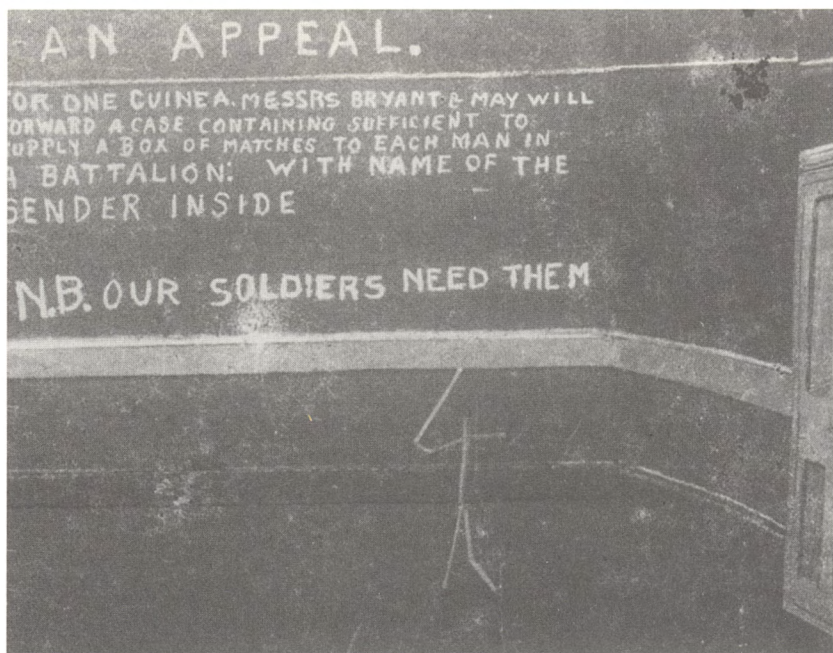
AMC testifies personally of his activities in the press and to the NFA

A staff reporter of the *Cambridge Daily News* has an interview with Melbourne-Cooper on August 8th, 1961 under the heading »When Boys Sat on Gas Bags At The Cinema«. A still from McNAB's VISIT TO LONDON is published together with a double portrait of Cooper, now living at Coton, near Cambridge, with his daughter Audrey.

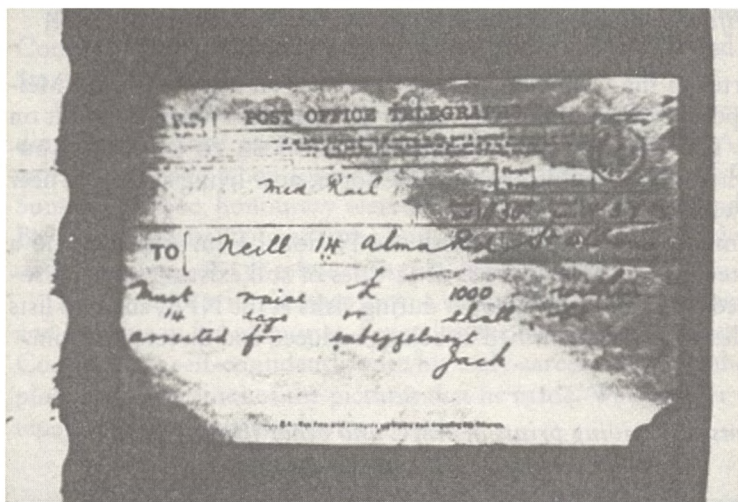
There is much correspondence with the National Film Archive, and a copy of a letter to the BFI with a list of 31 titles of still existing films personally identified by Melbourne-Cooper during visits at the NFA, and two lists of 58 film titles which he identified as being produced and directed by him.

*Films – surviving prints of AMC and other film-makers
of the early years of cinematography*

Audrey Wadowska collected many films, totalling 154, not counting the films that have no connection with her father's work. Of these films 49 titles are made by Cooper. Titles or synopses were named by Cooper as films made by



Frame from MATCHES APPEAL (1899), one of three still existing matches pictures made by Cooper, the oldest frame-by-frame animation films



The existing print of *FOR AN OLD LOVE'S SAKE* (1908) starts with a telegram in Cooper's handwriting addressed to »Neill, 14 Alma Road, St Albans«, – the studio address

him. Exteriors are locations in St Albans or studio grounds. Cooper himself played in some of the films.

About 23 films are claimed by Audrey Wadowska to be her father's films. They need further investigation. Among the other 82 films are titles credited to other film makers, possible remakes from original pictures by Cooper or indeed Alpha productions. They need to be studied before definitely crediting them to Cooper or to someone else.

An important very early animation picture, *MATCHES APPEAL* (1899), came from the family. This original nitrate was accidentally kept by the Cooper family in a tea caddy and therefore survived. Two other animated matches films were presented to her by collectors. A number of films were bought by Audrey from the National Film Archive or other archives. A copy of *THE BLACKSMITH'S DAUGHTER* (1904) was bought by us from the London office of EMI-Pathé.

At a photographic museum in Devonshire we bought original nitrate copies of *DREAM OF TOYLAND* (1906), *THE ANARCHIST AND HIS DOG* (1907, with Easton Pickering), *BILLY'S BUGLE* (1908, with Roger Pamphilon), and *FOR AN OLD LOVE'S SAKE* (1908). This film contains a shot of a telegram with the studio address in Cooper's handwriting. All films are identified as Alpha productions. The Netherlands Filmmuseum has preserved these films.

For practical and financial reasons, Audrey and Jan Wadowski acquired most of the films on 16 mm. The 35 mm nitrate films were preserved on safe-



Cooper playing a postman in *THE ANIMATED PILLAR BOX* (1907), here at Hillside Road, St Albans



Cooper – here with actresses Ruby Vivian and Lettie (Blanche) Forsythe – playing a mean Scottish golf-nut in *McNAB'S VISIT TO LONDON*, upsetting his cousins household and creating a shocking scene by loosing his kilt

ty film. Prints on 16 mm could be more conveniently shown by Jan during Audrey's illustrated lectures.

An interesting film, collected by Audrey, is *SOLDIER, POLICEMAN AND COOK* (Gifford: 1899) in which Cooper plays himself a jealous soldier. Cooper acted also in several other films. He can be seen in a chase in a picture entitled *THE ANIMATED PILLAR BOX* (1907). And he is clearly present as a Scotchman in the send-up of the game of golf in McNAB's *VISIT TO LONDON* (1905). It is unmistakably the same person as on the photographs of the 1909-Paris Convention of European Film Makers and Publishers.

There are lists available of the films in this collection.

We must add several short films taken by Jan Wadowski with his 16 mm camera, like shots in Coton where Melbourne-Cooper and his wife lived during the last years of their life; shots of Cooper's friend and partner Stan Collier in Aldeburgh, and shots of Audrey visiting people and locations in connection with her father's film making. They give an idea of Audrey's intense research in order to obtain recognition for her father as an early British film pioneer.

*1.b. Primary sources, concerning his partners, friends, colleagues
and other film pioneers*

Personal notes

One of the most interesting sources for a film historian are private notes of a »witness first class«: the film pioneer himself.

There is an interesting ledger with letters from Cooper to his bride-to-be, later his wife Kate Lacey, written between 1905 and 1911. Most of the letters concern the construction of his first Alpha Picture Palace in 1908, the year they got married. The letters give a dramatic insight in Cooper's love for moving pictures.

Our copy of *Moving Pictures – How They Are Made and Worked*, written in 1912 by Frederick Talbot (Lippincott, Philadelphia-Heinemann, London 1912), must be mentioned. It contains a complete set of copies at the proper pages of margin notes that Birt Acres wrote in his copy of Talbot which is now at the British Film Institute. Mrs Sidney Birt Acres, daughter-in-law of Birt Acres, gave us exact copies of these notes. Facsimiles of the most important of them can be found in *Light and Movement, Incunabula of the Motion Picture*, by Laurent Mannoni a.o. (La Cineteca del Friuli/Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, Gemona 1995). The notes are Birt Acres' counterclaims against those that film pioneer Robert William Paul made to Talbot. Acres, according to the family, wrote these notes not long after the book was published.³

2.a. Secondary material concerning Arthur Melbourne-Cooper himself

What follows is a short and tentative list of later sources. We still come across new material in the unsorted parts of the Wadowski estate, like interviews concerning the illustrated lectures of Audrey Wadowska on her father.

Later sources – oral and written testimonies by business partners, actors and actresses, friends, family members on the film pioneer and his activities

On November 17th, 1955, E.G. Turner, managing director of the Walturdaw Cinema Supply Company, once one of Cooper's most important distributing agents, writes to the newspaper *Evening News* that »Mr Montague Cooper [sic] had a film studio at St Albans trading as the Alpha Film Company. One of his pictures was A DREAM OF TOYLAND [...]. I took this film with a number of others to New York in 1907. The novelty of it created much interest and I sold many copies. In my opinion Mr Cooper was the first to make a film of this nature.«

In the *St Albans Gazette* of December 28th, 1956 Mr R.A. Pamphilon is interviewed. »At 12 years of age, he became the first boy cinema actor in



In 1956, Cooper and his wife Kate were visited by one of his former agents, E.G. Turner of the film distribution company Walturdaw

Great Britain, working on an average of four films a year with the Alpha Trading Company, Alma Road, St Albans for some twenty productions.« He was the so-called naughty boy in these pictures.

The Summer 1960 issue of the magazine *Hertfordshire Countryside*, volume 15, No. 57 publishes four pages on Melbourne-Cooper by Joe Curtiss, »prepared from material supplied by Mr A. Melbourne-Cooper's daughter, Mrs Audrey Wadowska«. On one of the accompanying photographs Cooper can be seen dressed in a kilt. It is a frame from the farce McNAB'S VISIT TO LONDON (1905).

This article inspires one of Cooper's actors from those early days, Easton Pickering, to write a long letter with reminiscences which the *Hertfordshire Countryside* publishes in its Autumn issue of 1960 (volume 15, No. 58).

Apart from his Cooper interviews, John Grisdale, on September 12th, 1960, visited Roger Pamphilon, the former Alpha child actor. He recorded a tape of 32 minutes.



In 1970, Audrey discovered old architectural drawings, photographs and design sketches of her father's second cinema, the Alpha Picture Palace in Letchworth.

Later sources – Cooper in the light of film historians and journalists

The fairground trade paper *The World's Fair* publishes on January 23rd, 1960 an article dealing with »the life of this remarkable veteran«.

The *Herts Advertiser* publishes a long obituary with photographs on December 7th, 1961: »Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, film-pioneer, is dead«. Obituaries appear in *The Times* of December 6th, 1961, in *The Kinematograph Weekly* of December 7th, 1961, and in other publications.

Varying in length, there are more than 50 articles from the period 1961 till 2002, the most recent by historian Roger Shepherd in *The Guardian* of 22nd March, 2002, »Spotlight on St Albans' film pioneer«. Although these can only be considered as secondary sources they contain interesting information and significant details that help to verify statements of oral witnesses.

Significant and informative is Audrey Wadowska's article »The oldest purpose-built cinema? Letchworth Palace is over sixty years old«, in *Hertfordshire Countryside* of July 1970, volume 25, No. 135, containing the results of her own research such as the architect's original design sketches for a purpose-built cinema, her father's second Alpha Picture Palace.

Published results of research by film historians and institutions – catalogues and historical surveys

Serious notice should be taken of some books because of their Melbourne-Cooper and Alpha crediting.

The most important one is *The American Film Institute Catalogue. Film Beginnings 1893-1910* (Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1995). This official two volume AFI catalogue is based upon undisputed source material. It gives two lists that are relevant to us: one of imported films between 1904 and 1909 under »Alpha Trading Co.«, the other during the same period under the name of »Arthur Cooper«. It names 17 different titles of films by »Cooper«.

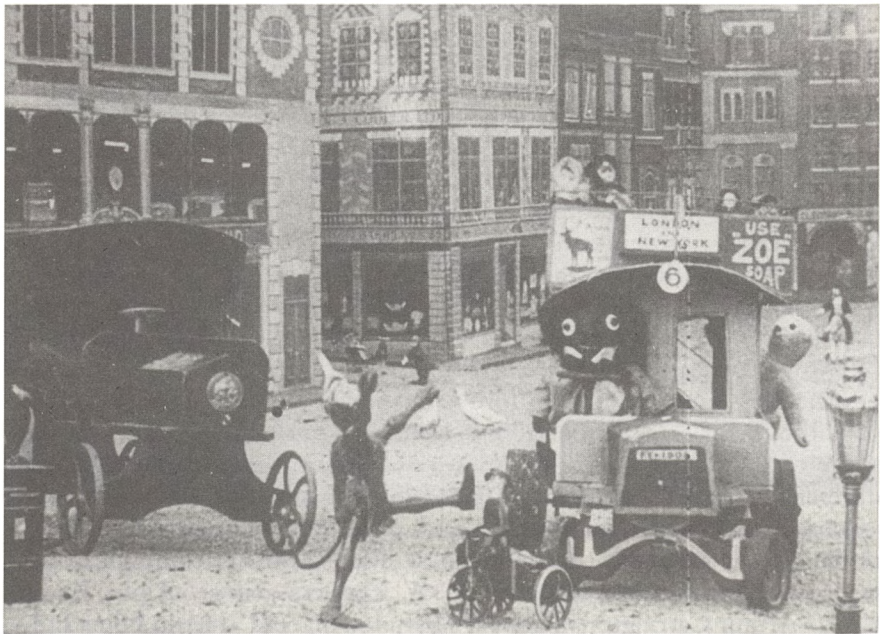
Another source is Denis Gifford's *The British Film Catalogue 1895-1970* (David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1973; 2nd edition 1895-1985, Newton Abbott/London 1986), dealing exclusively with fictional pictures. Using 295 different sources in his 1st edition, Gifford, from 1898 till 1915, credits »Cooper« and »Alpha Trading Co.« with 102 different film titles (including 5 re-issues), and in his 2nd edition with 108 different titles (including 4 re-issues), credited to »Arthur Cooper« or »A. Cooper« and/or »Alpha Trading Co.«, »Arthur Carrington« (Cooper's pseudonym) and »Heron Films Ltd.«. In his earlier reference work *British Cinema. An Illustrated Guide* (Zwemmer, Barnes, London, New York 1968), Denis Gifford credits 27 films to »Cooper, Arthur Melbourne«.

In 2000, a 3rd edition was published of *The British Film Catalogue* (Fitzroy Dearborn, London-Chicago, 2000) in 2 volumes: *Volume I, Fiction Film, 1895-1994* and *Volume II, Non-Fiction Film, 1888-1994*. Volume I credits the same 108 film titles to Cooper as in the 2nd edition. Volume II credits 5 titles to Cooper of which *A VISIT TO THE ROYAL MINT, THE EMPIRE'S MONEY MAKER* (1910) is an important documentary. It further credits 29 films to Andrew Heron, Cooper's financial partner in Heron Films Ltd.

A fourth book must be taken into consideration because the author interviewed Melbourne-Cooper independent from Audrey Wadowska's mediation. It is *Of Uncommon Interest* (Spurbooks, Bourne End, 1975; 2nd edition as *Hertfordshire Headlines*, Countryside Books, Newbury, 1987/1995) by BBC-reporter Richard Whitmore. It has a chapter »The Forgotten Visionary« dedicated to Melbourne-Cooper.

Concerning Cooper's two cinema's, *Cinemas of Hertfordshire* by Allen Eyles (University of Hertfordshire Press, Hatfield, 1985/2002) is of interest because of its information on the Alpha Picture Palaces at St Albans and Letchworth.

Other books are interesting enough to take notice of like *The Shell Book of Firsts* by Patrick Robertson (Ebury Press, London 1971) that gives attention to Melbourne-Cooper at several entries.



Scene from the puppet film *A DREAM OF TOYLAND* (1907), a master piece which is still amazing audiences

There is *Puppet Animation in the Cinema, History and technique* by L. Bruce Holman (A.S. Barnes, South Brunswick & New York/The Tantivy Press, London 1975) who mentions DREAMS OF TOYLAND and NOAH'S ARK as »may have been the earliest example of puppet animation«.

Again, 72 titles can be found in Denis Gifford's *The Illustrated Who's Who in British Films* (B.T. Batsford, London 1978) at the entry of »COOPER, Arthur Melbourne«.

Donald Crafton, in his *Before Mickey. The Animation Film 1898-1928* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1984), says that »MATCHES APPEAL (1899) shows Cooper's early grasp of the principle of stop motion technique«.

Elaine Burrows, in *All Our Yesterdays. 90 years of British Cinema* (ed. Charles Barr, BFI Publishing, London 1986) finds it »a rare combination« that Cooper produced animated and trick films as well as »live action shorts, both fiction and non fiction«.

21 of Cooper's animated puppet pictures are described in Denis Gifford's *British Animated Films, 1895-1985* (McFarland, Jefferson, N.Carolina, and London 1987).

There is Giannalberto Bendazzi's *Cartoons* (John Libbey, London 1994) acknowledging Cooper's MATCHES APPEAL being made in 1899 and mentioning 5 other animation films made between 1906 and 1913.

There are other publications, for instance Emmanuelle Toulet, *Cinema Is 100 Years Old* (Thames & Hudson, London 1995) that gives ample attention to THE MOTOR PIRATE (1906) as an early chase film.

*Unpublished manuscripts – the story of
Arthur Melbourne Cooper told by others*

Two unpublished manuscripts need to be considered. The first is John Grisdale's (unfinished) *Portrait in Celluloid*. Grisdale was a St Albans teacher of English language, commissioned by Audrey and Jan Wadowski to write Melbourne-Cooper's biography. The Grisdale tapes make it clear that he had no knowledge whatsoever of early film history. After her father's death in 1961, Audrey made several efforts to rewrite and finish the manuscript.

Pages of the manuscript were scattered throughout the Wadowski estate papers. I recovered most of the pages and together with Audrey's rewrites I copied them and bound them in book form, adding an index of subjects and indexes of films of Birt Acres and of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. Grisdale names 45 different films made by Acres and 172 different films made by Cooper. Bound copies are available for study in the archive at the St Albans Museum and at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, Amsterdam.

The second unpublished manuscript, *Pioneers of the British Film. The*

Work of Birt Acres and Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, was written by journalist (now actor) Luke Dixon who, during 1976/1977, was commissioned by the Eastern Arts Association to research and write on the two Hertfordshire film pioneers. Dixon interviewed Audrey Wadowska and Mrs Sidney Birt Acres, Birt Acres' daughter-in-law, and used a number of sources. His manuscript names 55 films made by Acres and 28 films made by Cooper. Bound copies of Dixon's manuscript, indexed by me, are in the archive at the St Albans Museum and at the Netherlands Filmmuseum, Amsterdam.

Our archive also contains the manuscript of Birt Acres grandson Alan Birt Acres, *Frontiers Man to Film-Maker*, in several re-written versions.

*Filmography – a descriptive list to bring to light
AMC's unjustly forgotten film production*

Based on a rough compilation from all the primary sources some 180 titles can now be credited to Arthur Melbourne-Cooper. This forms the beginning of a filmography, organised in a series of white ledgers with all the films in chronological order. Alphabetically, the motion picture titles, with all available data, are being organised in a number of black ledgers together with 1.020 photocopies of pages from trade catalogues published by Warwick Trading Company, Walturdaw, the Urban Trading Company, Cricks and Martin, R.W. Paul, Butcher, Prestwich and other distributors.

Audrey Wadowska – who made a very great number of notes and several lists of film titles during her interviews with her father, recorded or not – thoroughly studied these film distribution catalogues at the British Film Institute, the British Library, the Science Museum Library and several other archives, and she made photocopies of every page where she discovered her father's productions. These photocopies are at random numbered from C001 to C1020.

From January 1978 till April 1979, I interviewed Audrey about these catalogue copies. In these so-called »cataloguing interviews« she gives particulars about the films, original production titles, production dates and other details, names of actors, actresses and production assistants, identifying locations and giving the synopses as her father had remembered them. These interviews are the basis for the filmographies of Birt Acres and Melbourne-Cooper on which we are now working. The audio cassettes with the interviews with Audrey Wadowska are numbered from T011 till T045, in total more than 50 hours.

The filmography-in-progress already shows that, between 1897 and 1914, Arthur Melbourne-Cooper made 21 frame-by-frame animation pictures.

*2.b. Secondary material concerning his partners, friends, colleagues
and local persons*

*Audio tapes and cassettes – an in-depth research
into a film pioneers' life and career*

One of the most important parts of the AMC/Birt Acres Archive is formed by a collection of 88 reel-to-reel audio tapes and 380 audio cassettes. It is a merger of Audrey's collection of tapes and cassettes with our collection of 184 cassettes with interviews. It is a collection of a great variety of conversations, interviews and talks, all concerning the first twenty years of film history. The tapes and cassettes are described in a database and 129 are now in typescript, each preceded by a log file with technical and historical details.

Originally, from the Wadowski estate, came roughly 200 reel-to-reel tapes in varying formats and at different speeds, and almost 400 audio cassettes. We brought these back to 88 different tapes and 116 audio cassettes, plus 80 cassettes that were copied from the tapes. The other tapes and cassettes were less important, like radio talks on film history, copies from original tapes or cassettes, or even cassettes copied onto tapes.

Several tapes are in a bad state due to mishandling of the recording equipment and/or bad conditions under which they were kept during the years. A sound engineer put the tracks of seven of the worst tapes through a digital filtering process onto ten CD's to make transcriptions possible. There is a technical report of this process.

The tapes are numbered as TAPE I, TAPE II, and after TAPE XX as TAPE 21, etcetera. The cassettes are numbered as T001, T040, T201, etcetera.⁴ The transcriptions follow the numbering of the cassettes and the typescripts are subsequently called TAPE001, TAPE040, TAPE201, etc.

Audrey Wadowska interviewed no less than 152 different persons, including her own parents. There are 184 cassettes with our interviews with 33 different persons. Most of the interviews were with Audrey Wadowska. There is a database list of all these persons. Complete log files of all the 88 audio tapes are in two yellow ledgers.

*Correspondence – in search of testimony:
the life and work of AMC through letters*

Audrey Wadowska wrote an enormous number of letters; drafts or copies of them can be found in her correspondence. She received ever so many letters in return. Her correspondence was scattered throughout the estate collection. In the past, several efforts were undertaken to put all these letters alphabetically in filing ledgers, after which – then being able to retrieve many precious

letters – Audrey and her husband enthusiastically put them in their own mysterious sort of filing system.

Some three thousand letters will now be definitely put in a number of purple filing ledgers. There is much correspondence with actors and actresses from her father's period. There is correspondence with institutes and organisations and with other film historians. There are letters from E.G. Turner of the distributing company Walturdaw, and other colleagues of her father. And there is much correspondence with the National Film Archive.

*Photographs – visual proofs of locations, actors,
and the Alpha Trading Co. activities*

There are several thousands of photographs. There are many family photographs dating from the time of Arthur Melbourne-Cooper's father Thomas M. Cooper. There are many picture postcards taken by Melbourne-Cooper or his brother Hubert as a business sideline of the Alpha Trading Company. Reproductions are now in our collection. The originals are in an Alpha Picture Postcard collection of Mr Wilkinson and will eventually go to the St Albans Museum.

There are many film stills and other photographs related to cinematography of the period concerned. Lots of photographs were used by Audrey in her efforts to discover locations. Generally, Cooper's films contain a great many outdoor scenes. A location of St Albans in a film may suggest another credit for Cooper if the date is right.

There are many double, triple or quadruple photographs. However, there are only a few photographs of Cooper himself and not a single one of him with a moving picture camera. There are several set stills, photographs taken at an outdoor location between the shooting of film scenes.

The photographs have been sorted out, numbered, described in a database and put into albums by subject by Ati Mul.

Notes and papers – work still to be done

Audrey Wadowska left an enormous amount of unsorted notes, papers, newspaper cuttings, photocopies, film lists, and other paraphernalia behind. We are arranging these in a series of ledgers. Papers like programme notes of Archive Nights at the National Film Theatre, if they concern Melbourne-Cooper, will be sorted by date. Other items will be sorted by subject. They will be recorded in a database with fields for number, date, key words and a description. Audrey's hand written notes will be collected and bound together for later reference. Many notes date from the time when there were no easy photocopy facilities available.

There are 25 archive boxes with all kind of Audrey's material that still has to be sorted out. On our last journeys in August 2004 and January 2005, Jan Wadowski's executor gave us 10 more boxes full of material that still has to be sorted out. He still has several boxes of material in his house.

3. The results of our own research

This year, it will be 30 years ago that we began assisting Audrey Wadowska with her research on her father's life and career. Since then, we made more than 60 journeys in England, continuing the research after Audrey's death in 1982, discovering more material in libraries and local studies centres, where generous assistance of librarians and archivists helped us to discover in newspapers, trade journals, books, almanacs and catalogues much new material that corroborated Audrey's findings and the testimonies on her recorded interviews. A great help not only was the moral support of the Filmmuseum (Amsterdam) but also their practical help with the restoration of a number of nitrate Alpha pictures that we discovered.

Personal archive

Our own Arthur Melbourne-Cooper/Birt Acres archive has become linked up with all the material of the Wadowski estate. The photographs have merged into our photo-archive and database, with the exception of the material that is still with the executor.

We also built up lesser archives with much still unpublished material on Charles Urban, Robert W. Paul and George Albert Smith. There are 3 archive boxes and 4 ledgers with material on Birt Acres.

There are a number of folders with data on different subjects like Acres' journey to Hamburg and Kiel in 1895, Cooper's expedition in 1900 to the Isle of Wight filming *SHIPWRECK IN A GALE* and on his other journeys commissioned by Birt Acres to Stockton-on-Tees and to Scarborough. There is material on his *LONDON TO KILLARNEY* travelogue of 1907, according to Cooper with its 3,000 feet »the longest film of its time«.

There are 7 archive boxes with our own material still to be sorted out and put into the database system. Our own correspondence concerning the Cooper/Acres research is kept in 6 ledgers apart from Audrey Wadowska's correspondence.

There are two indexed ledgers with our personal writings directly concerning Arthur Melbourne-Cooper: 50 articles, texts of university lectures, other lectures, scripts for a proposed documentary and database lists (filmography, animation films, lists of tapes and cassettes).

Arthur Melbourne-Cooper's daughter Audrey, with the help of her husband Jan Wadowski, made an enormous effort in collecting as much material as she could in order to demonstrate her father's rightful place in early film history. Our subsequent efforts will result within the next two years into a filmography and a biography of a remarkable and inventive film pioneer, who was one of the very first independent and true cinematographers.

Notes

1 For this documentation, we owe much thanks to Prof. Dr. Margaretha Schenkerveld, Amsterdam, and to Christopher Wilkinson, Boreham Wood, UK, local historian and steward of the Barnet Museum.

2 The KMA was established to make an effort to combat American import and to impose conditions on the distributors concerning minimum prices, limitation of film life, etc. The chief British film producers were all signatories: Warwick, Cricks and Martin, Gaumont, Clarendon, Mitchell and

Kenyon, Hepworth, Williamson, Walturdaw, Alpha, Paul and Hough.

3 As personal annotations, not meant to be published, they seem rather more reliable than if Acres would have expressed them before an audience of journalists or family and friends. They should be taken into serious consideration in the Acres-Paul dispute.

4 In January 2005, we donated 28 duplicate tapes and 57 duplicate cassettes to the East Anglian Film Archive.