

KITTY WOOD

File # 6

8.6.87

A.C.T. Member No: 3924 at the Bush.
October 1941 - March 1944.

Although worse things were to come in February 1942 with the fall of Singapore, the war was not going well for the Allies in October 1941 when I joined G.B.Instructional Limited, a small documentary company under the umbrella of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, with offices and cutting rooms at Shepherds Bush Studios in Lime Grove, Shepherds Bush. The Young Mr.Pitt was being shot in the main studio at that time, directed by Anthony Asquith.

I was 19 and thrilled to be there, and when nobody was looking I would skip and jump along the corridor in which G.B.I. had its offices on the eighth floor. One snag was that the boss and producer H. Bruce Woolfe could only offer me £1. per week. Fortunately for me this fairly soon became £1.11.0d per week due to the timely award of a cost of living bonus to all staff. Even so it was considerably less than the £3.5.0d. a week I had been earning as a shorthand/typist at Hulton Press, who were publishing Picture Post and Lilliput during those war years. I worked very hard there and was pleased to learn that they replaced me with two other girls.

At G.B.I. I was assigned to that part of the company making instructional films for the Army Kinema Service. These were mainly written and directed by Donald Carter working in conjunction with an army officer. I was to be the assistant, so I typed the scripts, helped in the shooting and in the cutting rooms.

For anyone like myself wanting to be a film editor, my indoctrination in that department couldn't have been more unlike that of most aspirants.

At the time Donald Carter was completing an anti-aircraft film, so on my third day at the studios he said we were to do some editing. We took the lift down eight floors and went past the large stage to the other building, up in the lift another 8 floors and along a corridor with cutting rooms either side in which editors were working on Gainsborough feature films. At the end of the row we reached a small cutting room boasting an Editola, an upright rewind bench and a flat bench rewind table on which were two cans of 35mm. rushes. One of the rolls consisted of animated diagram, and the other live action material. The latter appeared to have been shot more or less in order; the animation was a bit more difficult to find and a certain amount of winding and rewinding took place to find the correct sections. Donald consulted the script to see the footage required for each scene according to the explanatory commentary on the right hand side of the script, which was divided into two columns, action on the left, commentary on the right. He would then pull out the shot from the roll, and after a brief look to see where the action started, he stretched the film from the tip of his nose to the end of his finger tips, that being 3 ft. In this manner he measured what would be needed of each scene, 8 ft. 10 ft. 18 ft. or whatever. Sometimes he ran through a shot on the Editola, more often he viewed it in the hand or on the bench. Then a snip with the scissors, and

the shot was secured with a paper clip and wound in to a roll on the rewind bench. And so, by lunchtime, we had "cut" a reel of between 800 and 900 ft.

This cutting copy was put in to a labelled tin and taken in to another cutting room to be joined on a Bell & Howell foot joiner. (I discovered later this was an unheard of luxury in a documentary unit at that time, where a hand joiner would be used and the film scraped and painted with cement by hand.) I was introduced to Betty Maybury Lewis who was to join the reel, a delightful girl probably younger than myself, and quite the most beautiful I've ever come across on the technician's side of the screen.

Of course, when I was thoroughly indoctrinated, we became speedy as a team. I was careful to type the scripts so that the commentary side would be in lines exactly 3 ft. in length. I would call out what length was needed, at the same time attaching a clip to the last shot and winding it in. At the end of a session I was not expected to file cuts, spares and N.Gs. They were all rolled together into large rolls and put in cans and labelled, and the hope was that we would not need to touch them again. When it happened we had to find lengths to add to the existing cutting copy, it was often a fine stromash with film all over the cutting room floor. Donald would kick his way through the film to the door, while I wound it up as best I might.

The army film section at G.B.I. turned out 40 reels in 1942, and this output continued pro rata well into 1943. I doubt if any other short film unit achieved such a turnover at that time.

No wonder we used short cuts such as not logging shots and not filing them under board numbers. Fortunately the neg. cutters, Miss Ward and Miss Smith logged the neg. and I'm sure saved the day on many an occasion. They were pretty toffee-nosed about our slipshod ways. Everyone working in the section was under great pressure to turn out these instructional films, because they were "for the war effort."

For my part I suggested taking the scripts down from dictation straight on to the typewriter as they were written, so unusual in those days that Donald took some persuading it would work. It did work and saved much time. During the writing stage he would be working with the Army officer concerned at his elbow. The typing and re-typing under extreme pressure undermined the accuracy of my typing, but I learned to be alert and work quickly.

I was permitted to lay the commentary on one film in the summer of 1942 when Donald was too busy to do so himself. I completed the two reels, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, but although they were passed O.K. by A.K.S. with the usual few amendments, I was most disappointed not to be given any more solo cutting until October 1943 when I was assigned to edit a 5-reel film on Rocket Projectors. This I did by a sort of hit and miss method. I would work all day and see the result at about 5 p.m. and spend a couple of hours or so in the evening correcting my errors. The first reel contained a lot of live action that took place in a railway carriage, with actors. I can't remember the reason for this. The rest of the film was the standard live action mixed with diagram. While I was still working on this film Donald Carter was appointed as producer for all the films at G.B.I. while Bruce Woolfe took a less active role. I no longer did any secretarial work.

Throughout the war, G.B.Instructional was not only turning out films for the Army. They made a popular series of shorts called The Secrets of Nature, which were widely shown in cinemas. H. Bruce Woolfe was in charge of that series as well as the Army films. He was from the Midlands and I've been told he was a tailor in his early days, always interested in films. In the Twenties he made two films about the First World War, one of which was called Armageddon. I recognised a clip from it, unacknowledged as such, in a recent four-part T.V. series about life between the wars presented by Alan Bennett. Bruce Woolfe had much to do with the establishment of Welwyn Studios.

Shortly before the war, Donald Carter wrote and directed a film about the Territorial Army called The Gap, as well as a film called Where Love Is God Is, starring Pamela Kellino. From 1940 onwards he made numerous films on anti-aircraft subjects, the main theme of which was anticipating where an enemy aircraft would be at a given time. The Stiffkey Stick was one such, which Donald wrote and the model work and animation was co-ordinated by Brian Salt. The Gridded Oblique was another. He made a film on the 25-pounder which was the main gun used in field artillery in the early part of the war. Soon after I arrived on the unit, shooting started on the 4.5mm, 5.5mm gun, field artillery. Shooting took 3 weeks at the White City Stadium, on the site which now houses the B.B.C. T.V. Centre. The film was completed in 1942 and was 22 reels long, 3 reels longer than Gone With The Wind. Reconnaissance and Occupation of a Position by a Regiment of Field Artillery was the film with the longest title I ever worked on. This was directed by Darrel Catling who worked on army instructionals as well as other films for G.B.I. A.K.S. felt unable to shorten the title in any way.

I suppose the most important person on the unit next to Donald Carter was Brian Salt who used his mathematical ability and skill in designing models and animation to excellent effect. He worked exceedingly hard, sometimes all night. His eyes became red-rimmed on that account. He was always in a hurry. I've watched him from the top of the lift shaft going down eight storeys several steps at a time - far faster than the lift. R.Jeffries was responsible for the animation shot at Diagram Films in Harpenden, another of Bruce Woolfe's companies. Jeff too, and his team, worked very long hours.

George Pocknall was the cameraman originally assigned to the unit, but he was killed in the blitz before I arrived. Thereafter Frank North and Jack Parker did the camera work, with assistant Jack Morrison. Jack Parker was well-known before the First World War in the days when studios were glass-roofed, and used the sun at one end of the studio in the morning, the other end trapping the light in the afternoon.

While Donald Carter scripted, co-ordinated the work and edited the output, Smith Morris was brought in to do additional directing about a year after I arrived. He directed the Course Finding Sight and the Rocket Projector Mark III.

Studio shooting was done on Stage 5 or 6 at Shepherds Bush when necessary, and the Gainsborough sound crew, Bill Salter, Les Abbott et al did the dubbing. Commentaries were spoken by one or other of the well-known B.B.C.

newsreaders. The titles were designed and shot in the Gainsborough title department by Albert Urry, a charming man to deal with, and I often did the dealing. (At lunchtime he used to put on his beaver hat and go to the Empire Cafe in Goldhawk Road, There he was joined at the same table each day by Guidobaldi, who was the studio model maker on Gainsborough features.)

The Army Kinema Service was situated in Curzon Street in the building which later became Securities Headquarters before M.I.5 & Co. moved to the new building they now occupy. The Head of A.K.S. was Lt. Col. Kitchin. As far as I know I never saw him. The officers we dealt with were Captain * Andrew Miller Jones who who was at B.B.C.T.V. when it started in 1936, and who later returned to the B.B.C., and Captain Geoffrey Sumner who became a well-known comedy actor. Of the Army officers seconded to the unit to ensure the accuracy of the work we did, the most often around was Captain Ian Matheson, and later assisting him, Captain Gerald Jacobson. There was also Captain Hugo Walter of the family who owned The Times, and Captain Dundas Hamilton who became asst. Head of the Stock Exchange in the 1970s. He was part inventor of the Gridded Oblique which I think was something to do with Air Observation Posts. We certainly made a film about it.

Many of the technicians I worked with during that interesting time are now dead. Donald Carter died in 1968. I always called him Mr. Carter, not Donald, and he always called me Miss Wood. To the rest of the unit I was Kit or Kitty.

* Later still, Miller Jones was Films Officer for NATO.

RECEIVED 1 MAR 1995