FILMS ON FIRE?

We're always keen to look at how members fill those gaps between contracts that are normal for most of us in the freelance world.

Author, Sound Editor John Crumpton is a relatively recent recruit to AMPS. He's a BAFTA award winner for his ADR work on Jimmy McGovern's 'Hillsborough' and has since been twice nominated for 'Queer As Folk' and 'Clocking Off'. When between contracts, and once all the gardening and decorating is done, amongst other roles, he is the Creative Director of KBS Productions.

A recent project meant taking a step back into production work after years in the editing room.

As much as I love audio post production, I think it's valuable to spend time out of the editing room, if only to remind oneself how difficult the job of a location sound recordist can be. The change from post-production to production work is something that I enjoy immensely so if things are quiet on the editing front it's a no-brainer.

A couple of years ago I made *Past-Present-Future,* a 25-minute documentary about the Working Class Movement Library in Salford. Actor Chris Eccleston kindly narrated the commentary for me and it was a really pleasurable project to write and produce. A friend of mine, Louis Loizou, helped out with the filming on that production so it was terrific to have the opportunity work with him again on a new venture.

The task for me and my team was to produce six short video dramas with six Salford schools. The results were screened last November at the Salford Film Festival to much critical acclaim.

Sponsored by the Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service and part of the Clapperboard Youth Project, each group of youngsters worked with professional writers to create scripts around themes of fire safety, community cohesion, road safety, smoking, arson, hoax calls, attacks on fire-fighters, etc.

Like me, Louis's a teacher, film-maker and writer with plenty of experience working with young people. So after the writers had developed a working script about fire issues with the pupils, we went in and did eight or so weekly sessions on basic film language, story boarding, camera work, acting, lighting, sound recording etc. These practical classes led eventually to recording each school's script in a hectic two day shoot.

We were well aware that at this level of community production the audio often lets down films that visually look extremely good. To get around this issue we bought a Rode NTG2 microphone and boompole and a Rode VideoMic (we couldn't afford Sennheisers unfortunately). At least we'd always get reasonable audio with the Sony PD 150 and PD 100 DV cameras we were using. This provided an opportunity for some of the pupils to try their hand at 'boom swinging', monitoring etc. Most of the time things worked out very well and we recorded reasonable quality sound to work with in the edit room. As with a professional shoot if I felt that a line of dialogue wasn't clear or we needed a specific location sound effect then we'd set up and record a wildtrack as a back up.

Even though it was summer the weather wasn't always kind to us during the filming. I've worked in the North West most of my life so un-forecast rain doesn't exactly come as a bolt from the blue. Somehow we always seemed to find a way around problems. At two separate schools two of our young actors weren't well enough to turn up for the second day's filming creating general apoplexy and hasty last minute re-scheduling.

We had excellent support from the teachers and teaching assistants in all the schools and were always made to feel that our efforts were appreciated with several going that 'extra mile' to find locations, provide refreshments and agree co-operation from local people and businesses.

Some of the scripts were somewhat over ambitious for our limited budget, with attacks on fire engines, schools burning down, car crashes and so on. However through a mixture of imagination, ingenuity and calling on favours we managed to overcome most obstacles.

Art Director and Vice-President of BECTU, Lawrence Van Reiss set designed a hospital emergency room and showed the youngsters the secrets of how to do realistic make-up. They got an insight into the

'tricks of the trade' whilst having the chance to ask questions of industry professionals (incidentally all BECTU members) about what it's like working in the media.

Well known actors Amer Nazir and Parvez Quadir came in to offer guidance about performing on camera. At another school we had the benefit of Nigel Travis, who when not on duty as a fireman, is a TV actor, so it didn't take us long to cast him as the fireman/father in one of the stories. In addition he also arranged for two fire engines to turn up on the day we were filming to add authenticity to an arson scene. Again all the actors had experience of working with young people and they were great individuals to work alongside. Meanwhile Louis and I concentrated on the technical side of things with those pupils who wanted to be involved behind the camera.

On occasion we had assistance from Creative Industries in Salford so other community film-makers were able to work together on this challenging project. The filming itself was a mixture of fun, excitement, pandemonium and hard work. However the stresses were more than outweighed by the energy generated by all concerned.

The skills and disciplines needed for film-making are not easy to acquire in such a short period and we used 2 cameras most of the time to give everyone a go. On certain shoots 3 cameras were employed where we knew we only had a short time to film and only one opportunity to get useable footage.

Due to the small budget if we didn't get it 'in the can' there wasn't the money to 're-shoot' later.

Regrettably the school children weren't able to be too involved in the editing as we post-produced over the school summer holidays. However, the pupils did get to view and discuss rushes and agreed fine cuts with us before we finally 'locked off' picture.

All the films were cut on Final Cut Pro. Louis edited one of the films and I engaged two other sympathetic picture editors. I'd worked with Faisal Qureshi before and he achieved some brilliant green screen matte and multi-screen effects for certain sequences in the two shorts he edited.

The final three shorts were completed by Andrew Davies, a young editor, who Louis had mentored a few years back whilst at Salford University. He's a talented, enthusiastic and (thank goodness) a computer wizard. Alongside being picture editor also was able to 'compose' instrumental backing tracks for several scenes using Soundtrack Pro software. This really added mood and emotion to the final mix. Other musical tracks were provided by supportive musicians that Louis and I knew.

Once the track-lays of all the films were completed the audio was exported as OMFs and we took the LaCie drives to Liverpool where musician and mixer Alan Watson has his Vocalbooth studio. Here he equalised, cleaned up and balanced our tracks over two days.

Unfortunately we didn't have quite as much time as we'd have liked to review the six final mixes (combined running time of about 30 minutes) as Alan was playing a gig in Southport later that night! (You may ask, when was the last time you heard this as an excuse for not working overtime from a re-recording mixer?)

At the last minute Alan produced from his own 'back catalogue' of music tracks some excellent cues that just 'finished' off sequences that had seemed a bit flat and 'bald' with only the sync and effects.

Captions: (from top) St George's pupils create 'news footage'; Moorside pupils with JC; Buile Hill pupils as cast - starting fires (in the refuse bin); Lawrence Van Reiss trying to finish make-up on cast member

with only the sync and effects. This idea of every person contributing creatively to a films' overall success has always been important to me.

Film making is, or should be, very much about people working together creatively as a team whilst taking individual responsibility for their own role. The sum should be greater than the parts and there's a place for everyone in my view. So it's been really rewarding to see these young people come into there own and to watch their confidence and abilities grow as the process has gone on. And who knows perhaps it's sparked an awareness and interest in images and sound that may lead for some of them to a future career in the business? Either way it's good to know that at least half of the schools we worked with are planning to produce their own film-making projects this year due in some part to the success of our efforts.

A DVD copy of all the films was given to all participants in the project and GMF&RS will be using them as part of their educational programme in fire safety awareness in and around Greater Manchester in 2008.

For further information www.johncrumpton.co.uk

Captions: (from top right) John with pupils from St George's; Louis Loizou and Buile Hill pupils; A&E ward set at Moorside School; Louis and John 'white balancing'

All photos by Denise Gillaspy

Jean-Maurice-Émile Baudot

Lose the 'ot' and we get 'Baud', a unit of speed of digital data transmission.

Baudot was born in France in 1845 to a farming family. He became an admistrator in the French Telegraph Company but an interest in the technology saw him study to become an engineer. His 'Printing Telegraph' overcame the slow speed of the then systems by using his Baudot Code, a digital system that allowed time division multiplexing over a single line and the ability to send six messages at the same time. This became the basis of the Telegraph for the following decades all round the world.

A Baud became the measurement of telegraphic transmission speed - 60 words per minute (in English) was about 45 Baud. More sophisticated digital transfer meant that a baud didn't so accurately reflect the amount of data passing and most measurements are now quoted in Bits per Second (bps). However, those early adopters of digital technology - audio and computers - will be familiar with the name, Baud(ot)