

407

MEMORANDUM

Date..... 8th ~~Apr~~ *Apr* 19

From M. SMEDLEY ASTON

To *Mary Harvey*

Subject..... Notes for BECTU.....

When I left school in 1929, I went into Advertising in London. However, The Depression began in '30 so my career as an Adman lasted a bare 18 months. I had wanted to get into Films & after several attempts, managed to land a job at British International Pictures at Elstree - or to be more precise, Boreham Wood. My 'pay' was 25/- p.w. as unit runner - I don't think they used 3rd Assistants then. After 2 & a bit years, I'd become a 1st Assistant and was in the big money, £5 p.w. B.I.P. didn't use Production Managers, so the 1st Asst: carried the whole Production. After 15 Films, I quit & got a job at Gaumont-British (Lime Grove) as Assistant to Raoul Walsh, who was to direct "O.H.M.S.", an Army recruiting picture starring Jimmy Cagney. Unfortunately Warner Bros slapped an injunction on J.C., so we had to settle for Wallace Ford (Wallace who?). To my chagrin, for want of a better word, Mr Walsh had his own Assistant but as luck would have it, same was Dave MacDonald & we became firm friends. I worked on the first Film he directed, "When the Poppies Bloom Again" in Black & White & was able to give him his last job as a director on an episode of "The Third Man" which I produced at Elstree **B.I.P.** Studios. . My spell at 'The Bush' was brief, as the Osterers had overspent & as last in, I was first out! Fortunately, I was able to get a job as 1st Asst at Shepperton (Sound City) with George King, a maker of quota quickies with such titles as 'John Halifax Gentleman', 'The Ticket of Leave Man' & several Films with Tod Slaughter, who has become something of a cult in France! George didn't pay over the odds but was a very nice man to work for & he gave me my first break as Production Manager. We turned out one 'film' every 3 weeks, so after nearly 3 years I left (amicably) to join M-G-M at Denham. Can't recall the exact reason but I took over as 1st to Sam Wood on the original version of "Good-bye Mr Chips" starring Robt Donat & Greer Garson. I then did 'The Chinese Bungalow' with George King & went back to M-G-M to start on "Busman's Honeymoon" but Hitler marched into Poland & Ben Goetz *scarpered back to Culver City & I became a reluctant Airman.*

Copy for Roy.

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9.4.1997.

Dear Mary,

I couldn't write sooner, as I've only just got confirmation re our travel arrangements. Unfortunately, British Midland has a monopoly in air travel to London, so the prices of fares are astronomical. Full rate to London is £249; whereas one can fly from London to Las Vegas for £251! Anyhow, we aim to be 5 days in The Smoke arriving p.m. on Sun: 27th.

I've had a look at the BECTU leaflet, the History Project and am quite willing to participate. I'm enclosing some notes re my pre-war activities, when I worked at Elstree, Lime Grove, Denham & Shepperton. I think that Wed: 30th would probably be the best time to record musings. I'll need some guidance re how much detail is required. Elstree in the '30s was a far cry from Boreham Wood to-day.

I'm sure that you've been in touch with Carole Lloyd but apart from Gerry McKnight, whom I'm trying to contact, I can't think of anyone else who one might contact. Brian has told me that Roy Boulting will be the chief Speaker.

yours
Jimmy

P.S. Sorry. Just realised I put the carbon back-to-front on my notes.

⊗ Note for Roy -
Signed referring
to F.H. Memorial.

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