

Mount Pleasant Studios Present

HOW DOES ONE set about making a feature film with little equipment, limited finance and no previous experience? The first thing, I thought, when I set out on the venture last Summer Term, was to be absolutely sure of the answers to a few fundamental questions and to have a written film script on which to base the filming. So, after much consultation with interested people, I decided that the film should represent a typical day in the life of the School, be in colour, last about 25 minutes and incorporate a sound track with commentary, music and a few simple sound effects. I then asked Adrian Jeliffe to write an essay on A Typical Day on which I could base my ideas for the shots. When this had been done I disappeared into the library and finally emerged, three days later, tired, ink-stained but victorious with 30 pages of filming script stored away in my file. Part of this script looked like this:

<i>No. of Shot</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>From where</i>	<i>Length</i>
153	Medium	People going out of dining room	Under balcony	12 secs.
154	Long	Sunny field with loafers loafing	Swimming bath	15 secs.
155	Medium	Brighton beach	Girls' changing room	10 secs.
156	Close-up	Legs with trousers rolled up. Pan to faces	Brighton beach	8 secs.
157	Close-up	Sabby's legs. Pan to face	Brighton beach	6 secs.
158	Medium	Group of people lying on field	Hockey pitch	12 secs.

The whole thing indicated a total time of about 28 minutes with over 250 separate shots, though I realized that I wouldn't keep to the script exactly.

Finance was the next thing, and I made two fruitless journeys to London to see if I could purchase film at cut prices on the grounds of the proposed film's educational value. But in the end, the film, which was the main item of expenditure, had to be bought over the shop counter, after the necessary £20 or so had been borrowed from various sources. The equipment was also borrowed from members of the School—the tripod, light meter, tape recorders, projector and screen. The two powerful lamps used for lighting the interior shots came from the physics laboratory. So, all in all, the Mount Pleasant Film Company, as it was known from then on, was founded on very precarious ground.

A date was finally fixed for the shooting to commence, Monday, June 10th, and the Sunday evening before that, Peter Bradley, the assistant director, and I

nervously checked over the details and went to bed praying that it would be fine the next day.

It was indeed fine, and just after recess, the Mount Pleasant Film Company started its hazardous career by shooting Mr Cadman striding very naturally across the asphalt to a games lesson where keen First Form boys waited, already changed, to dash from the changing rooms to the field (which they did perhaps a little too eagerly).

The main part of the outside filming was completed in four days—every time a scene had been shot I ringed its number with great satisfaction in my script. The reels of film were one by one used up and sent off to the processing factory. The outside shots went along without too much difficulty, apart from trouble from the occasional person who could not refrain from making obscene signs or grinning apeishly into the lens of the camera. (I have in my possession a very interesting reel made up of pieces of film which I didn't use for reasons such as these.)

But the inside shots caused chaos. We fused the dining lights three times when we tried to use the big lamps in an effort to film the clock. We broke two windows while manoeuvring the long ladder on to the balcony, over-zealous for startlingly angled shots. We disturbed occupants of the library for two hours on a Sunday afternoon with the incessant ringing of the gong. People tripped over the great lengths of cable stretched down the corridors. But the final blow came when the lights fused in the middle of an important pan of a bedroom scene, plunging the whole of the boys' end (and Mrs Miller's room) into darkness at about half past nine. And it took ages to find the fuse box.

But at last the processed reels of film were lying on the editing desk and the most difficult and interesting part of all lay in front of me. All 250 shots had to be cut out and stuck together in the right order to make a smooth passage from one event to another. It was at this stage that the weak ideas were eliminated and wangles were contrived to get over the tricky scenes.

Who noticed, for example, that Miss Ellinor changed her dress three times in the dining scene? In the very first version of the film, which no one saw except me, the three shots of her in different dresses came next to each other—which was very amusing. But I thought it necessary to sacrifice humour for the sake of continuity, and so in the re-edited version I put a shot of the clock between two of the shots and moved the third further away from the others. Who also noticed that Mr Gray's shirt and tie changed colour as he walked from the staff room into the class room? This apparently smooth sequence had been filmed on three separate occasions. There were lots of little things which stuck out like sore thumbs to me but passed unnoticed when the film was shown to an unknowing audience. If you see the film again, watch the red screwdriver jump across from Hugh Busher's left hand to his right for no apparent reason. Or see the clock in the girl prefect's room at ten to twelve in the middle of the hot lethargic afternoon. You could also wonder at the size of Peter Bradley's wardrobe, for he changes his clothes at least four times during the film. And how does Paul Barnard manage to play cricket and yet thirty seconds later become engrossed in a game of chess? Or Felicity Steinitz move from the front door at Hillcroft to her bedroom window in a micro-second?

The sound track was the last job to be done. This was made on tape, synchronised to the film by a special projector which ensured that the right sounds would always come at the right time. The music was finally selected by Ian Whiteman and the few sound effects gathered together on another tape. Then the Company's sound technicians got to work. The commentator sat with a microphone partitioned off from the room where the film was being screened, but he could see the film through the glass in the partition. This was necessary to prevent the noise of the projector appearing on the sound track. The film was run through and at the right moments the music was played, the sound effects were sounded and the commentator commented—while the tape recorder ran side by side with the projector. After many attempts, we at last made a track which, although it did not exceed our expectations, was just about satisfactory.

On a budget, then, of £20, and after six weeks of work, the film was completed and ready for general release. Members of the School, it seemed, received it at first with delight—as a novelty. But when most people had seen it at least three times they realised its faults which I have known all along.

The commentary was undoubtedly the weakest part. As for the film itself, the main criticism was of apparent rush from one event to another. It seemed that at this school the pupils never relaxed, were always dead keen on everything, and never stopped their activities from morn till night. Although this may have given an excellent impression of the School it is nevertheless a trifle unrealistic. The trouble is that twenty-eight minutes is a remarkably short time when one tries to represent a whole day. As it was, I had to miss out much that I would liked to have included and there simply wasn't time to put in shots of people doing nothing at all. My continual worry while I was filming was the shortage of film. When professional film companies make documentary films they shoot five minutes of film and perhaps use only five seconds of it. The Mount Pleasant Film Company shot five minutes of film and had to use four and a half.

However, I believe that the true value of the film will appear in thirty or forty years time when all of us, as Old Scholars, can see "what the School was like in our day".

MATTHEW ROBINSON.

Leaver from 6₃ in July.