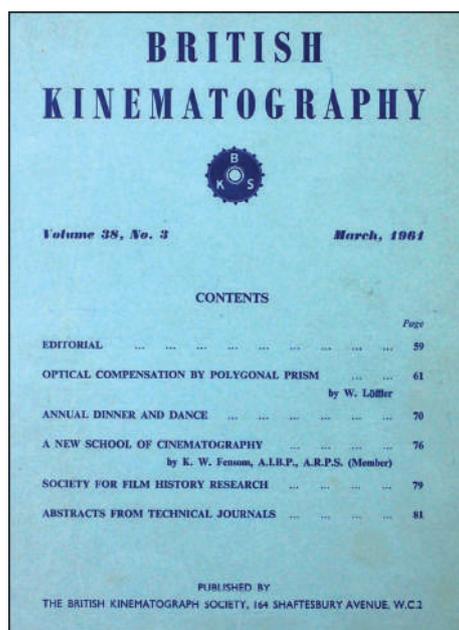


IMIS Reawakens

Mark Trompeteler FBKS on the past and future of the UK's society for the technical side of the moving image



British Kinematography, March 1961

Do any of these abbreviations ring a bell? IMIS? BKSTS? BKS?

They're the changing initials to date of the British technical society for the motion picture industry over nearly a century of existence. How did it start? What did it do? What is it doing today?

In June 1916 in America, the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (SMPE) was formed with ten founder members. Twelve years later, in 1928, a group of thirty film technicians in Britain who were members of the American SMPE met to form a London branch.

However, in the first two years of this British group, difficulties arose with the Society's American management over liaison, finance and delivery of local activities. By 1930, the London branch, now numbering 120 out of a total SMPE membership of 800, was discussing breaking away completely, believing that it had a good basis for a separate British technical society for the motion picture industry.

The British Kinematograph Society (BKS) was duly formed with the first meeting taking place in April 1931. Early activities included meetings where members networked with each other, presentations of techniques and papers on industry developments, while a wish was drafted to provide training for film projectionists and film repair staff.

The growth of the film industry at the beginning of the 1930s was rapid. In early 1932 a delegation from the BKS visited the London Polytechnic in Regent Street (now University of Westminster) to lobby the Principal. They had identified a need to establish a two-year-long course to prepare

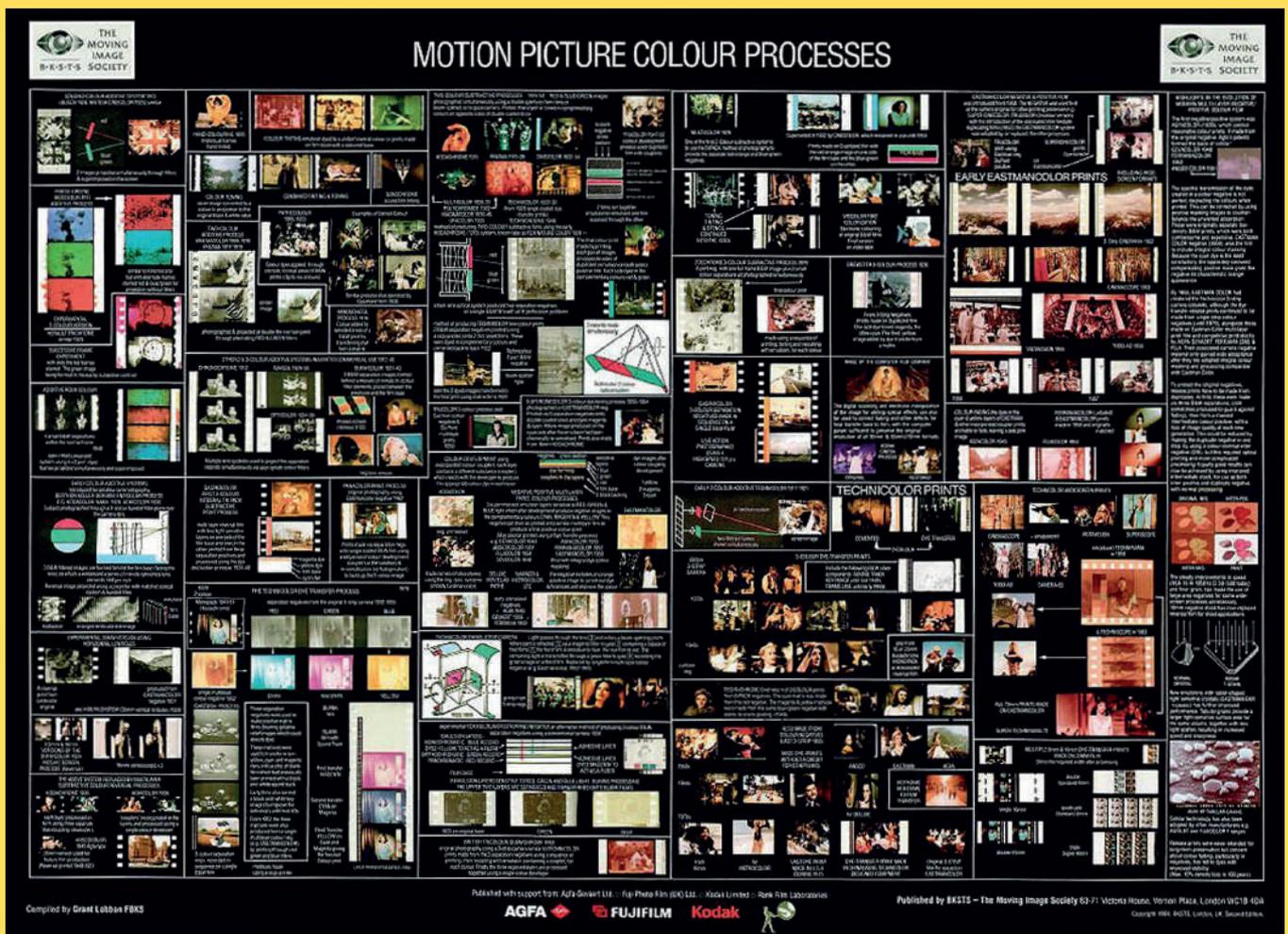
and train new entrants for employment in the film industry. The Polytechnic involved the BKS heavily in the preparation of the syllabus and approach of the course. The BKS acted as both an advisor and accreditor for the first major UK course in film production. The first group of students started in the autumn of that same year. The 1933 Autumn edition of *Sight and Sound* magazine included a report on the course. The BKS philosophy behind it was quoted: "it is the aim of this present course to attain these ends by making for better understanding of the other man's job as well as a greater efficiency in one's own".

The period 1931 to 1938 were years of steady growth. In 1937 the Society published its first edition of a quarterly publication, *The BKS Journal*. The Society published eleven papers on various technical subjects concerned with the motion picture industry.

By 1938 the BKS had acquired its own offices in Shaftesbury Avenue with its first organising secretary, R. Howard Cricks, whose family had been early pioneers in the industry.

Immediately after the Second World War there was a very rapid increase in membership and in Society activity. The BKS established a collection of books on industry topics. The programme of publishing technical papers also saw rapid expansion.

In 1947 the title of *The BKS Journal* was changed to *British Cinematography – The Journal of the BKS*. Its first paid professional editor was R. Howard Cricks, the organising secretary, who retired from this role in 1951. There followed a



Above: BKSTS wallchart.

long period when the journal was put together by honorary editors and a publications committee. The second paid professional editor, from 1975 to 1981 was Ron Harris, followed by Tony Lawes from 1981 to 1986. John Gainsborough, a relative of the famous portrait painter, took up the role in 1986 when the journal changed its name to *Image Technology*.

The BKS changed its name to The British Kinematograph Sound & Television Society in 1965. The Society's passion for networking and exploiting the synergy that happens when different specialists come together contributed to industry individual careers, industry collaborations and innovations on a noticeable scale. These included organising training courses in new industry developments, bringing different companies together with members to exchange information, providing foundation courses in basic technology principles for new entrants, the development of equipment test materials, inputting to industry standards organisations, and organising lectures and events for members in different geographic regions and in different industry disciplines. There was a myriad of activity and achievement.

In 1969 the Society organised its first major conference, trade and industry fair, "Film69", at the Royal Lancaster Hotel. Film-makers from fourteen countries attended with a series of papers being presented and conference proceedings transmitted on colour CCTV feed to twenty-three hotels. The National Film Theatre ran a supporting programme of films on cine technique; a series of factory and studio visits also took place. Bi-annual conferences and trade shows continued,

on and off until 1995. Unfortunately, the finances involved in them contributed to severe monetary problems for the Society.

It was an incredibly busy and successful period for the Society with a number of full-time staff, including a full-time Training Officer. The Society organised and delivered many training courses across a breadth of disciplines and published many booklets, manuals, and technical papers. Active members were behind important publishing initiatives – such as Grant Lobban, who authored numerous industry sponsored booklets on the history and principles of motion picture processes and contemporary film formats. He was also responsible for much of the work on the first suite of BKSTS wallcharts that still hang on the walls of countless production offices, facilities houses, cultural, academic and entertainment organisations, and remain available for purchase from IMIS. Martin Uren produced *The BKSTS Illustrated Dictionary of Moving Image Technology* which was published by Focal Press and had several successful editions and changing titles.

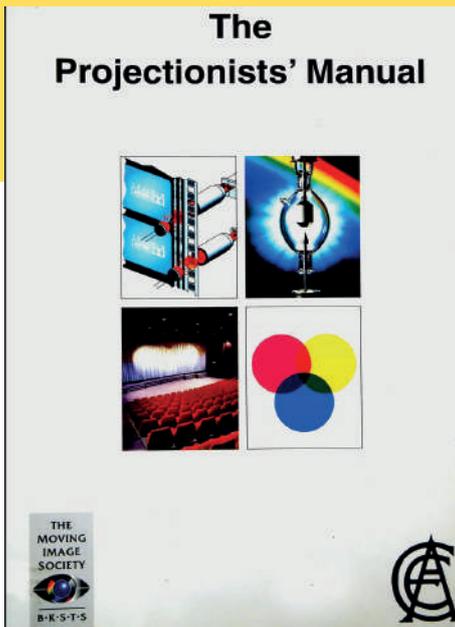
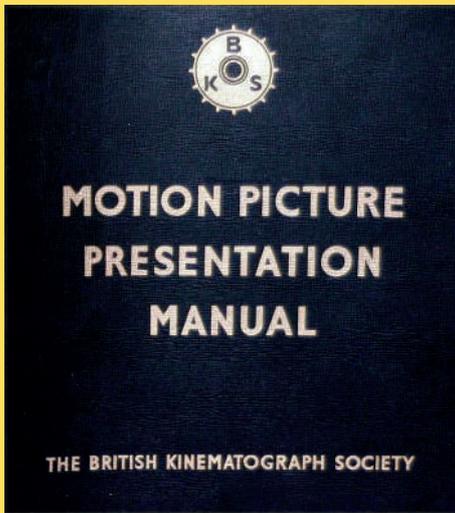
Full-time staff notwithstanding, the success of the Society during these four or five decades was very much a result of many of its members giving up some of their free time to both co-organise its many activities and to contribute to them. This collaboration of members together implicitly fulfilled the aims of the Society – an invaluable network of moving industry contacts was established and flourished. During this period there were distinct members' committees (or chapters/communities) delivering activities

in Membership and Admissions, Conferences, Papers, Training, Technical Advice, Laboratory Work, Television, Sound, Audio Visual Technology and Cinema Technology. The Society also had distinct regional branches within the UK, with their own Chairperson and Hon. Secretary delivering local activities – Midlands, North-West, South West and West of England. During this period a very large number of the major companies, manufacturers and broadcasters and industry organisations contributed to the Society in terms of financial sponsorship, non-financial assistance and support, plus other collaboration.

In 1981, on the 50th anniversary of BKSTS, its sister organisation, The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, provided the Society with a microfilm copy of all the SMPE and SMPTE journals published to date going all the way back to 1916. It also presented a beautiful citation certificate to the Society acknowledging "its contribution to the technology and service to the craft of the motion picture and television industries."

In 1984 the Society organised its first international two-day conference on Special & Visual Effects. Conferences were then held bi-annually until the early 2000s, many at Pinewood Studios. They attracted delegates from around the world and were highly influential in the industry development of these two disciplines. The Society also organised several conferences and symposia on wildlife programming.

During this incredibly busy period for the Society, it wasn't all work and no play: numerous dinners were enjoyed, either associated with the



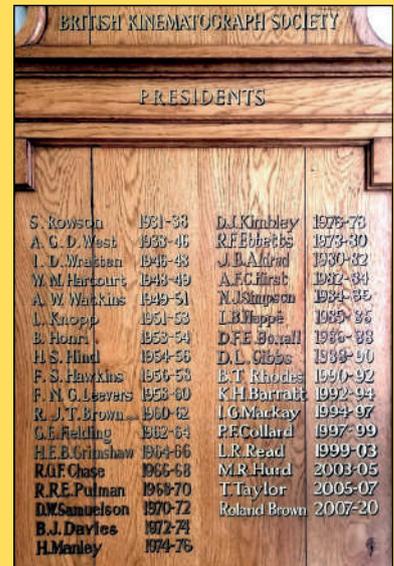
BKSTS projection manuals.



BKSTS film format book.



Left: The citation certificate presented to BKSTS by SMPTE in 1981.



Right: The honours board of Past Presidents of BKSTS 1931-2020 on display at Pinewood Studios. (During the dormant period 2020-2022 the President was Nigel Hamley and as IMIS re-activates the Acting President is David Pope.)

conferences or the annual awards ceremonies and keynote annual lectures. Pinewood Studios, which still generously supports the Society, was also the venue for summer barbecues in its gardens for members, sponsors and their families.

Image Technology continued to be published until the 1990s, at first as a quarterly journal, then as a bi-monthly, then a monthly, and finally back again as a quarterly.

In October 1987 an initiative from the Society's Cinema Technology Committee led to the start of a companion publication to *Image Technology* – the quarterly *Cinema Technology*. 1995 saw the arrival of the fifth paid professional editor of the Society's journals – Jim Slater. *Image Technology* was awarded a prestigious literature prize by a confederation of international moving image organisations for its outstanding contribution to publishing knowledge of developments within the moving image industries. Although *Image Technology* is no longer published, *Cinema*

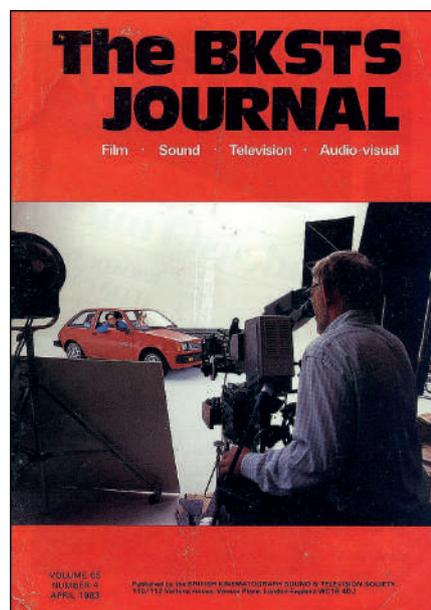
Technology continues as a membership benefit today, both printed and online.

As a benefit, members have access to every article that has ever appeared in either journal as pdf downloadable documents. These can be referenced via a digital key word search facility only available to members. It is an outstanding and unique archive that charts the development of the whole breadth of the moving image industries in detail – invaluable to students, lecturers, industry and academic researchers, authors, journalists and anyone with a passion for the industries.

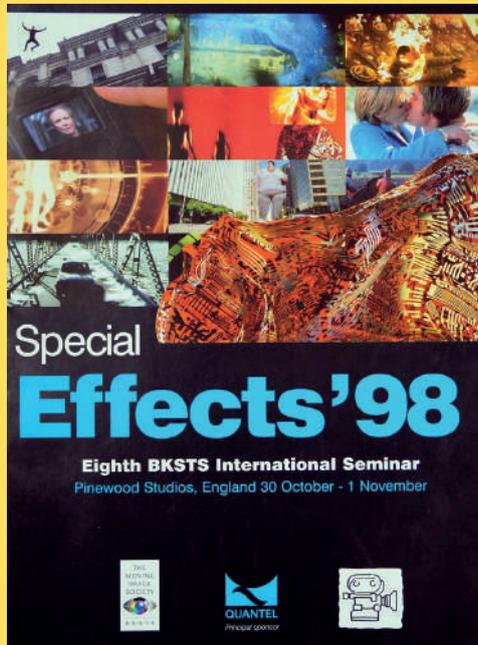
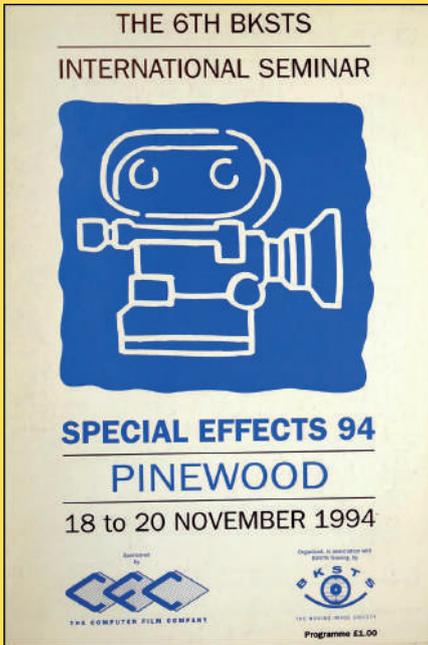
The second half of the twentieth century, particularly the period 1960 – 2000, were years when BKSTS was a major driver and catalyst in the development of the moving image industries, both nationally and internationally. But the period 2000 to 2020 saw difficulties grow for The Society. Many superb activities events and collaborations still took place, often involving key figures contributing – typical examples being Sir Christopher Frayling giving a lecture on Sergio Leone in 2015 from a medical cinema facility in Guy's Hospital and a keynote 2018 lecture on the BBC Natural History Unit with honorary fellow Sir David Attenborough contributing.

Regular publication of *Cinema Technology* continues to this day, but with the Cinema Technology Committee breaking away from BKSTS to form a separate body, Cinema Technology Community (CTC). The vast archive charting the development of the moving image industries was digitised and made available to members. Accreditation of moving image courses waned and then re-established. Bryan Cook, over several years in the period leading up to 2019/2020, organised a series of superb informal presentations, get-together networking sessions, right in the heart of London's postproduction village, Soho, at the Zero One studio. These were all streamed live on the web.

The Society has had an office in a few different locations over the years including Piccadilly, Vernon Place in Victoria, Ealing Film Studios and, today, Pinewood Studios (where its collection



BKSTS Journal, April 1983.



BKSTS Effects 94, '98 and 2000.

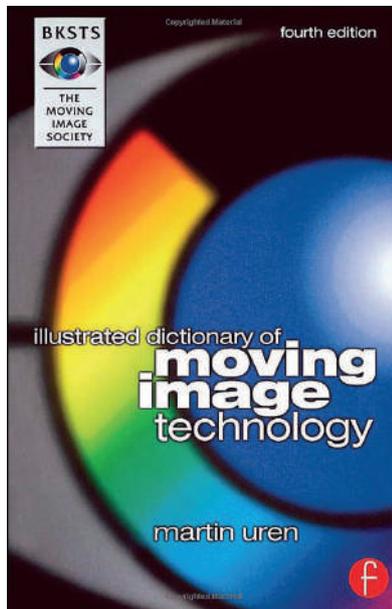


of books on industry topics, started in 1947-48, continues to be accessible). More recently employed “organising secretaries” or COO’s have included Wendy Laybourn and Bryan Cook. In 1994 Wendy was elected as the first woman Council Member of the BKSTS and subsequently elected as Honorary Secretary – then employed by the Society as Executive Director from 2003 until 2007. She was awarded a Fellowship of the BKSTS – the first woman to be awarded this honour.

In 2016, in its 85th anniversary year, with members in twenty different countries, the British Kinematograph Sound and Television Society (BKSTS) changed its trading name to The International Moving Image Society (IMIS). By this time, it had already seen a significant decline in membership over the preceding decade. As technology became completely digital, and an older generation of professionals retired, the Society perhaps came late to engaging with the new younger generations of professionals. Somewhat belatedly, the pattern of membership did begin to change – to be more inclusive and reflective of the industry, with more younger members from diverse backgrounds at entrant and junior levels, and more young women joining. Despite a very significant financial bequest to the Society from a former member, the late John Tompkins, a wildlife cinematographer, monies employed in staff and supporting society activities did not yield the levels of turnover and membership that was anticipated. By 2020 The Society was close to being wound up.

After two years of reducing losses from the still significant finances remaining, consolidating all assets, and re-modelling some fundamental infrastructure, 2023 sees a quite small group of enthusiastic members committed to reactivating the Society. With that reactivation of the Society, a more modern restatement of the Society’s philosophy that *Sight and Sound* magazine reported back in 1933 is restated on the new 2023 IMIS website.

IMIS encourages its members to improve their knowledge about the work and developments of



BKSTS Moving Image Dictionary.

other disciplines in our industries as well as their own and exploits the synergy that happens when different specialisms come together. It is in many ways far more relevant to today’s fast-moving industries than it was in 1931 when the Society was formed. With people re-joining and joining, getting involved in its operations and growth, and a now more gender, cultural and age diverse membership, the scene could be set for them and the Society to contribute once again to fuelling the further development of our great moving image industries.

Do visit us at www.movingimagesociety.net

And if you would like to get involved in collaborating with like-minded individuals with a passion for the moving image industries and be interested in assisting with some of the practical operations that need to be undertaken to re-activate and grow IMIS, please do contact the author via email in the first instance: mark.trompeteler@movingimagesociety.net



Cinema Technology, first issue, October 1987, and Autumn 2022.