

Alan Lawson

With Alan's quiet death at the age of 90, a near last living connection to the founding of the Association of Cine Technicians, a principal forerunner of BECTU, is gone.

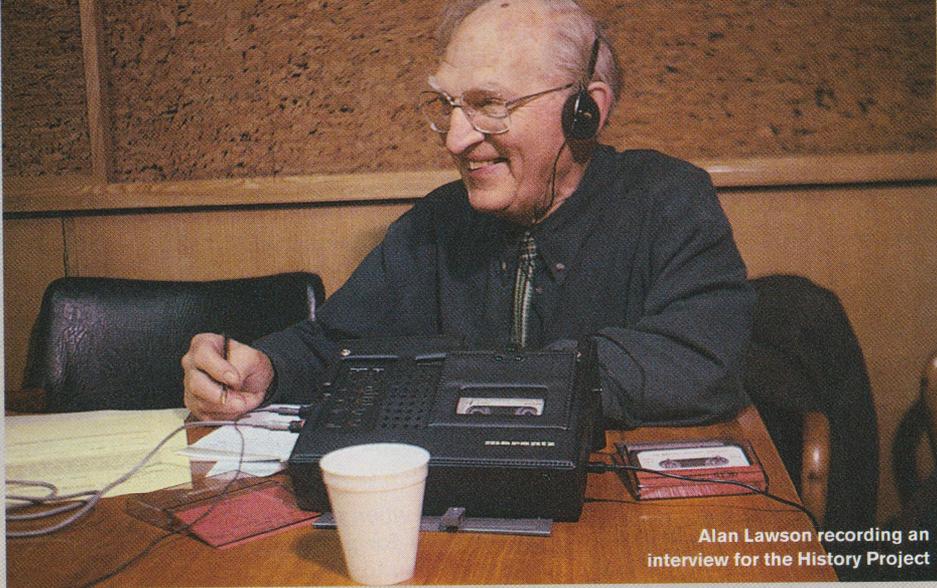
Alan was a happy and enthusiastic man. In 1928 he went into "the film business", the camera department of Gaumont's studio at The Bush at the end of the silent era.

For the next 10 years he followed a peripatetic trail around lost studios in those days of 'quota quickies', six-reel movies made for one pound per foot – Stolls, ATP, Sound City, Worton Hall, Marylebone. In 1933 at ATP, Ealing's ancestor, he was one of those brave enough to challenge the front offices and establish ACT as a technicians' trade union, not the professional association that some were advocating.

Alan had a strong sense of social justice. In 1938, with other ACT colleagues, he travelled to Spain to film the civil war, shooting four documentaries for Ivor Montagu exemplifying the republican cause. He followed by working as a news cameraman and photographer until his raw stock ran out, whereupon he drove a supply truck. When there were no more supplies he took escaping members of the International Brigade across the border into France.

He returned from Spain a committed socialist. For a time he was a member of the Communist Party which in those days had considerable influence within the union.

Then it was Britain's turn.



Alan Lawson recording an interview for the History Project

With the start of World War Two Alan joined the Army Film Unit, teaching recruits to be combat cameramen. Over the next six years, attaining the rank of captain, he filmed in England, Burma, Singapore, on the continent, and was detailed to cover the liberation of Norway. It happened that his unit arrived before the troops so they were instructed to spread out along their train to make the numbers seem more formidable to a bemused enemy. Thus his claim to have liberated Norway!

Early on in the war he wooed and won Anne, then a nurse. Tony, their son, was born at war's end followed by Sally, their daughter, so as a family man he returned to Alexandra Palace for the BBC, firstly as cameraman (much that he shot is now stock archive footage), then films operations manager, then working for Enterprises. His time at the Beeb ranged over many years and diverse activities, from a documentary

about Henry Moore to a recording of Spike Milligan reading his own poetry.

Upon retirement he took the job of vestry clerk at St. George's, Hanover Square. On the face of it a curious occupation for a non-believer but one can see how it suited him to help people search among church records for trace of their ancestors. There's a later echo of that in the ACTT History Project. When I started this oral history initiative in 1986 Alan was among the first volunteers and his subsequent contributions were vital to the heyday of its success as, unexpectedly, it became a national academic resource. For many years he was the project's honorary secretary. Latterly, as his mobility decreased, he reluctantly yielded some duties but never his interest. In 2001, in recognition and gratitude, he was created life vice-president. Earlier he had been made an honorary member

of ACTT, serving on general council and as treasurer.

Born in Romford he grew up and later settled in Hampstead Garden Suburb and its environs were dear to him and Anne.

Alan Lawson was a man of great integrity, sometimes to his own cost. He was steadfast and loyal, absolutely dedicated to a cause, seeing and living life optimistically and with a sense of humour, both shy and proud of his varied achievements. Seemingly imperishable, he's going to be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Tony is a world ranking film editor. Nicholas, Tony's son, has followed his grandfather on to camera crews and is a focus puller.

Alan's rewarding life is complete. To Anne, his treasured wife of over 60 years, to Tony and Sally and to their children, his colleagues offer their fraternal condolences at his passing.

Roy Fowler