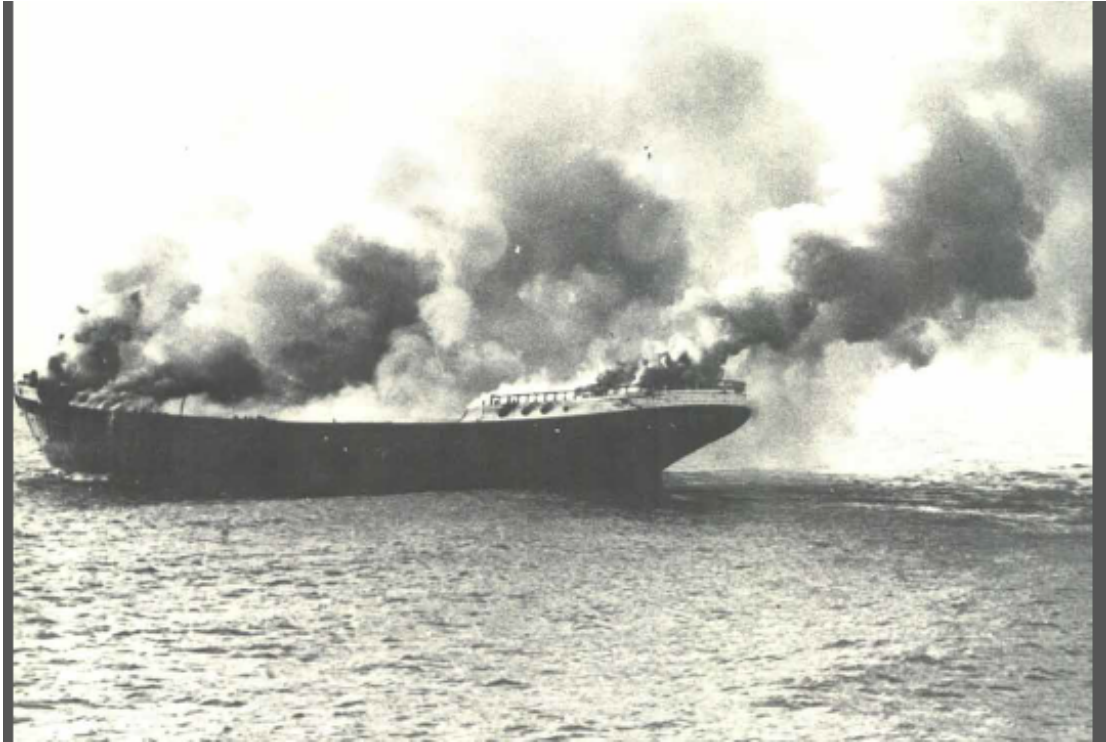


**TOWARDS ENDOWMENT FOR  
THE NATIONAL FILM & SOUND ARCHIVE  
AND  
A NEW, PURPOSE BUILT HOME IN SYDNEY**



What you see in the photograph above is Australia's visual heritage being destroyed.

In 1927, the American director Norman Dawn combed the archives and cinema storage units of Sydney for nitrate film to use in a scene in his film adaptation of Marcus Clarke's "For the Term of his Natural Life".

The highly flammable film stock was used to build the fire in the burning ship. At the end of shooting the scene, one million feet of Australia's film history had vanished.

In 1964, an alert young editor at Cinesound films in Balmain, Tony Buckley, saved a hoard of Australian feature films from the cinema heyday of the 1930's, which had "no value" and were ready to be thrown out.

How much of the visual record of Australia's social, political and artistic history has been lost? No one will ever know.

2014 is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the National Film & Sound Archive. In 1984 it was given its own building in Canberra. Even then, the Archive was not provided with purpose-built accommodation appropriate for film conservation, but was moved into the old Institute of Anatomy in a back street in the Canberra suburb of Acton. Seventy years after the creation in Australia of the world's first feature film, "The Story of the Kelly Gang", film conservation was still the poor relation of the

nation's culture. The National Library and the National Gallery are housed in magnificent purpose-built accommodation on the dazzling shores of Lake Burley Griffin, and the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), received a one-off grant of twenty million dollars from the Howard government to develop its resources on its site in Kensington NSW.

Making the best of the situation, since 1984 a dedicated staff at NFSA has worked to preserve and conserve. Always short of money, their budgets have been at the whim of successive governments who never, no matter what their political persuasion, could ever quite see the importance of a voteless issue such as conservation.

Every other Western nation has a well funded, well accommodated film archive, a proud representative of their national culture, where not only the visual history of the nation is conserved, but public access is encouraged to study, research, learn and be entertained about their country's past.

In the past 30 years, not only has there been an explosion of visual material recording every aspect of Australian life, but the digital revolution has given the Archive a whole new set of problems. In addition to having to conserve images on all media from nitrate film through fading Eastman color to disintegrating videotape, the Archive now has to conserve digital material with constantly evolving recording, mastering and replay technology.

Generous post production houses and film distributors have provided funding for the most urgent projects, such as the re-mastering of the outback masterpiece "Wake In Fright" and the preservation of the Cinesound and Movietone Newsreel libraries. But in fifty years, money has been found to convert from nitrate to safety film only *two* of the 17 Ken G Hall feature films saved by Tony Buckley.

The staff of the Archive still work in the same tiny rooms they moved into 30 years ago, and they still work, in many cases, on the same outdated equipment. Meanwhile, an avalanche of our pictorial and sound history piles up, waiting to be conserved.

Recent budget cuts have led to a restructure of the NFSA, and cancellation of a number of activities, including the shop and various screening initiatives. Closure of the library is on hold.

So instead of being appropriately funded to embrace the future of film history and preservation, the organisation is turning inwards, in a desperate attempt to keep pace with the present.

As well as conservation, the repository of the nation's visual memory should be accessible to a wide audience, which should have the opportunity of attending screenings, looking at memorabilia and being able to study the past in the most pervasive art form ever invented.

With the best will in the world, Canberra does not have the audience to justify this aspect of an archive's activities. Melbourne has the ACMI, which does an excellent job of making film and television history available to the public of that city.

**The NFSA should be moved to Sydney, to a purpose-built home which encompasses conservation, preservation and space to embrace interaction with the public.**

To be clear, the NFSA's storage facility in the Canberra suburb of Mitchell should remain where it is, at least for the foreseeable future. But the management and preservation activities should be moved to Sydney.

Such a move would ensure the NFSA greater visibility, and both interaction with and support from the film production, film trade and film cultural (including academic) communities and their audio equivalents. Close interaction with Sydney's state of the art post production facilities would be invaluable and cost effective for its preservation activities as the means of recording visual and sound material continues to evolve and change.

The move would also, as part of that process, more sharply focus the identity and broader public recognition of the NFSA for what it is – a unique collection of the output of Australia's moving image and sound production sectors.

It is political reality that competition for funds for the arts will always be fierce. The Archive needs a one-off injection of funds which will future proof it from the ongoing exigencies of governments struggling to fund the national estate.

**AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL FILM & SOUND ARCHIVE NEEDS A NEW HOME AND AN ENDOWMENT FUND AND IT NEEDS THEM NOW!**