



Sector Special: Film in Staffordshire



Focus on: UKFilmLocation.com
Reels in Motion
Grand Independent
What Staffordshire University can offer



An introduction to the developing film industry in Staffordshire

Welcome to the first business sector special featuring the film and associated industries in Staffordshire. Thanks to my four co-contributors for their articles:

- Tim Beasley – owner of UKFilmLocation.com based in Blythe Bridge, Staffordshire
- Phil Bland – co-owner of Reels in Motion based in Longton, Stoke on Trent
- James Fair and Peter Rudge– senior lecturers in Film technology, Staffordshire University and co-owners of Grand Independent

Next steps

The authors of this briefing are intending to have occasional get togethers to discuss ideas and possible collaborations. These meetings are likely to be in the form of after work drinks or a visit to a local curry house. If you are interested in joining us contact me at jon.fairburn@staffs.ac.uk or on +4 (0)1782 294094 or James Fair at j.e.fair@staffs.ac.uk.

Jon Fairburn
Enterprise Reader
Centre for Applied Business Research
Faculty of Business, Education and Law
Staffordshire University



Front cover image: John Thompson on the set of Pulp – see pages 4 and 5 for more details
Here: All these locations are available for filming from UKfilmlocation.com. More can be seen on pages 4 and 5





Drivers for a growing film industry and our local film ecosystem – Jon Fairburn

There is a growing number of film and associated creative industries in North Staffordshire. The drivers which have created this situation are:

1. Global – the impact of digital technology which has dramatically reduced production costs, increased widespread communication and allowed completely new processes of production and consumption.
2. Local – the role of the university in producing graduates who are both highly skilled and have developed employability or entrepreneur skills whilst at university, allowing them to establish local businesses.

Staffordshire University has one of the largest amounts of film, TV broadcasting, special effects, animation and creative industries degree courses and postgraduate courses in the UK. The university also has its own technical facilities such as TV and recording studios. On the Stafford campus the Film and Special Effects awards have 430 students across the three years. On the Stoke campus Media (Film) Production FTVERS, Radio Production, Music Broadcasting, Media Studies, Scriptwriting and Drama have 557 students. Media (Film) production at Stoke has another 150 approximately over three years.

Several film businesses (e.g. Reels in Motion, Inspired, ST16, Humanoid and Grand Independent, to name but a few) have formed due to university policies (e.g. SPEED/EFS/HEIF) that support entrepreneurship and business development. The university has also expanded into postgraduate provision with external industry-facing partners, Filmbase (Dublin, www.filmbase.ie) and Raindance (London, www.raindance.co.uk). These courses provide a platform for our network of festivals and film markets. The course in Dublin is used to stimulate film production practice in Ireland, and a feature film is produced in Dublin as part of the award.

Opportunities for future growth include:

1. National policy for the development of local TV services in the UK: 21 cities/conurbations have been chosen of which one is North Staffordshire. Paul Dobson of the Business School and Chris Priestman of Creative Technology are currently leading a project to develop 6 Towns Radio as a social enterprise and to also acquire one of the local TV licences.
2. Globally, the enormous worldwide demand for content through the provision of hundreds of digital channels and a growing middle-class population worldwide.
3. At a European level, the proposals for the funding round 2014-2020 (Horizon 2020): there will be greater involvement of SMEs and more projects closer to market.
4. The university: it could, for example, use its contacts with the wider film industry to invite firms to the region for presentations given by local MPs and councillors about the package that Staffordshire can offer.

Other parts of the local film ecosystem in Staffordshire include:

- Existing media, BBC Stoke (radio and TV), Signal Radio and 6 Towns Radio.
- The Business School, which has an established course in Event Management which organises the Staffordshire Performing Arts Festival which includes a film strand.
- The Stoke Your Fires Film Festival: an annual event organised by Stoke-on-Trent City Council in collaboration with the university and a range of other stakeholders. www.stokeyourfires.co.uk
- The Stoke Film Theatre, which provides independent and world cinema. www.stokefilmtheatre.org.uk
- To see all the courses that Staffordshire University offer go to www.staffs.ac.uk.

Conclusions

Staffordshire has an emerging and growing sector and we need to develop the correct policy to support the private sector. This policy is unlikely to be the high cost capital intensive projects which make such popular photo opportunities. Rather it is more likely to be around expanded numbers of film festivals and screening events, improvements in networking, guidance and support for getting funding, and support for existing micro businesses to grow as well as marketing of the human capital to attract medium and larger size production companies to the area.



UKFilmLocation.com supplies film locations to Lucozade, Hyundai and others! – Tim and Rosie Beasley

In 2003 Tim and Rosie Beasley bought an old farmhouse near Stoke-on-Trent. Never in their wildest dreams did they think that in just six years that this house would lead them into the film industry and that they'd soon be sourcing locations for Endemol, BBC and ITV, or for Ridley Scott and Bratt Pitt movies. In those early years the UKFilmLocation.com website was basic and purely created to advertise and promote Stallington Hall Farm as a flexible film location, with the intention of attracting filmmakers and photographers to film at the property.



After limited success, it was clear that this initiative alone was not going to get traction with the search engines and so the strategy of the website was changed to also promote third party properties. Hits developed significantly and today UKFilmLocation.com receives in excess of 100,000 hits per month (ranked fourth highest by its Midlands based service provider) and focuses on promoting the 700 film location properties on its books. These locations span cafe's to museums, ruins to penthouses, and



The locations here and on the following page are available from UKfilmlocation.com

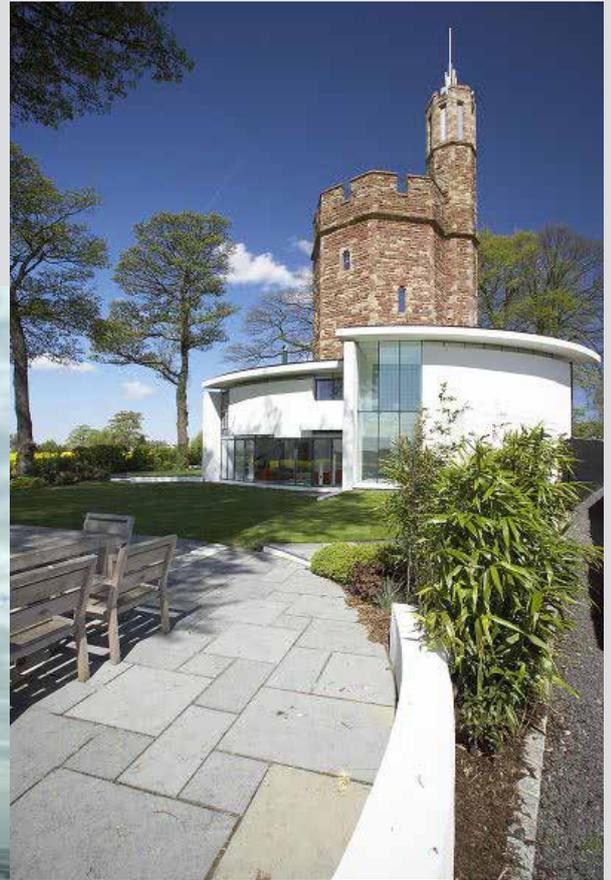
family homes to castles, warehouses, factories and everything in between, and the Agency has also accrued several high profile celebrity property owners such as Sarah Beeny and her Rise Hall.

Today, the company interacts daily with leading companies from film, TV, photography, music promotion, media, PR and events, and has provided locations for, amongst many others, Tinie Tempah, Roll Deep, Diversity, Nokia, Hyundai, Wretch32, and Lucozade. The team at UKFilmLocation.com currently comprises three full time employees, as well as several part time contributors and agents who feed locations and opportunities back into the business.

With an increase in revenue and profits every quarter over the last eight quarters, the future looks bright for this recession-beating Staffordshire-based company, justifying the faith that Tim had in working the long hours



to get the business off the ground and taking on the established agencies in London. In the next 12 months, and with the continued support of Staffordshire University, local people and the local film community, UKFilmLocation.com plans to double the amount of locations to 1400 and, with the recent hiring of an experienced Business Development Manager, also plans to double the staff count.



As part of the growth strategy, UKFilmLocation.com has now expanded its portfolio from purely being an online locations agency to becoming a full-service locations agency, adding production support services to its portfolio such as:

- Location management – effective and efficient management of small or large film shoots
- Location scouting – identifying the right location, within time and budget targets
- Aerial photography – balloon based high level eco-friendly photography
- On-location catering – catering for any size shoot, on time, and where required
- Specialist filming – safely filming off bridges, or hard to get places



UKFilmLocation.com is actively recruiting locations of all types (warehouses, industrial buildings, executive or family homes, shops or factories), in all states of presentation, for short, medium and long term projects. There are no fees for joining the agency and every shoot is fully insured. UKFilmLocation.com currently promotes properties in the UK, Europe and in Africa.

Please call +44 (0)844 669 5245 or visit www.UKFilmLocation.com for further information or to register your property.



An offpeak return to Stoke station please mate – Phil Bland

I shouldn't be writing this. I should be watching my beloved Tottenham Hotspur playing Lazio on ITV4. But I'm not. Instead, I'm writing this from pre-booked seat 044a, coach C on a scruffy Virgin Pendolino (remember when they looked like the future?). I've finished my greasy Upper Crust panini from Euston Station. I've politely asked the aggressive starey man to vacate my seat (don't judge me, it was pre-booked and the train is very busy) and I am cosily settling down to listen to my seat-neighbour shouting down the phone to explain that the reception is poor on trains (really?).

Why am I doing this? Because I've had to go to London to meet a West Midlander and a Yorkshireman, and to call a Luxembourgian on my phone about making a film. The perceived reality of the film industry in the UK is that 'business is done in London'. Nowhere else. Fair enough. It's not far from the truth. But wouldn't it be great, just for once, to be able to make films a little closer to home? Or at the very least, take a film-related meeting closer to home?



A still from Pulp the movie; Reels in Motion

Since Reels in Motion started in 2004 (Holy Pendolino, where has the time gone?) we have been lucky enough, and worked hard enough, to be able to complete one feature film. Pulp was financed, produced and shot in the region on a shoe-string budget with a lot of favours and freebies called in (and no assistance from 'public' organisations) to make it happen. Pulp will receive a UK release early 2013. If the film gods smile on us, it will be a success and will go on to a worldwide release. By making Pulp, we have proved that you CAN make a film in Staffordshire. We've even proved that you can make a decent film which gets seen by people other than your mates (wonder of wonders) and get it into festivals (Pulp has been shown at Cannes, Chicago, Las Vegas, Tel Aviv, Marbella, and...Prestatyn!).



What we haven't been able to prove is that making feature films in Staffordshire is a sustainable business model which offers full time employment to graduates, attracts the best freelance technicians into the region, and allows for a legacy (there's that bloody word again) for the next producer, writer or director to make their own Pulp. No. To do that, we would need to make three or five or even ten feature films. EVERY YEAR. Our current ratio is one in eight years but we're doing our best to change that. We have six new films on our slate which have a chance to make it through development and finance, and onto green light, then production. 'How



will we get these films made?', I hear you ask? Well...let me get back to you about that, but one thing's for certain, this won't be the last late night train back from London involved in the making of them.

At this point, I would love to make a visionary announcement about how we can instigate the founding of Hollywood in Staffordshire. Unfortunately, starey man is staring at me, shouty seat-neighbour is shouting at me, and we're pulling into Stoke station so the Solution™ will have to wait for now while I 'collect my belongings'.

Reels in Motion – www.reelsinmotion.co.uk

For more information on Pulp, which stars John Thompson and Jay Sutherland, visit www.pulpthemovie.com. Contact Phil on +44 (0)1782 377455 or at p.bland@reelsinmotion.co.uk.

Grand Independent: the industry is right here – James Fair and Peter Rudge

The higher education (HE) sector and the UK film and television industries have never been quite the happy bedfellows that maybe they should be. What interaction there has been between the industry and HE has principally been built on the assumption that degree courses in film and television are simply suppliers of the future workforce. Even here, the film and TV industries have a high level of distrust of much of the HE sector, believing it to be out of touch and not developing students to a sufficiently high level.

From a university perspective, employer engagement and enhanced student employability sit at the heart of many a Vice Chancellor's strategic plans and HEFCE is keen to ensure that employer engagement is tested within the creative industries and cultural sectors as in other industry sectors. Knowledge transfer in particular is seen as a real challenge for faculties that work in the creative industries. Knowledge transfer is primarily seen as the development of technologies through high level research at university that then gets passed down to industry via

patent development or particular expertise accessed through consultancy.



James Fair and John Bradburn on the set of a 72 hour film project

The film and television industries have always been the drivers of innovation, with universities being seen as somewhat behind the curve, dealing with overly academic concepts and structures that have no real relevance to the growth of the industries that they purport to serve. Indeed, such has been the level of distrust that the industry lobbied national government to set up Skillset, the industry's sector skills council, to 'kitemark' media courses and ensure that they are fit to feed students into the film and television industries. However, the impact of recent legislative change on the structure of both

the British film industry and HE funding has shifted this relationship significantly. The UK Film Council and the Regional Screen Agencies have either disappeared or morphed into new organisations and all of a sudden, the soft comfortable rug of government funding has been pulled from under the film industry's feet. Whether you view that as positive or negative is immaterial – the landscape has changed and both the industry and education need to find new ways forward.



The new fees structure, along with the rise of private universities offering highly industry-focussed courses, means that HE now needs to take a long hard look at exactly how the relationship with the industry and its students will change. All that talk of entrepreneurship in university plans now needs to be realised. One example is highly feted, the partnership between Arts University College Bournemouth and Framstore, but it is difficult to determine whether these links are actually cannibalising the existing jobs market for graduates or genuinely providing a sustainable progression route. Should students be operating on existing projects in order to keep industry costs down? Or is there a way of using technologies to create new projects that can compete in the market place whilst simultaneously providing high level experience, with production role responsibilities, as part of the assessment?

For those at the cutting edge of the industry engagement movement, the penny has already dropped. A few universities have woken up to the fact that all that investment in film production resources, both human and physical, and the consequent year on year creation of content, can have a commercial value. The leading universities in the field are realising that they no longer need be just suppliers of skills to the film and television industries – they can be content creators and suppliers themselves; they are a new form of the industry.

Staffordshire University in particular has been at the forefront of developing new models of sustainable and profitable film production. In 2008 the university entered into a production partnership with two UK film production companies to make the feature film *Soulboy*, led by Peter Rudge, a senior lecturer in film production technology and an Associate Producer on the film. This saw an investment from the university into the production through cash and in-kind, along with around 25 of its film students gaining work experience and the all important first feature film credit, whilst completing assessment to accredit their learning. It was a difficult but highly innovative partnership, one which Film Birmingham called



James Fair on location shooting A Saharan Diary

‘a groundbreaking new approach to filmmaking’ and ‘an innovative working model that could become a new standard for low budget film production in the UK’. The University of York recently emulated this partnership model with *The Knife That Killed Me*, four years after Staffordshire led the way.

Meanwhile in 2008, the university again broke new ground when a team of academic staff and students, led by senior lecturer and director James Fair made the feature film *Watching & Waiting* at the 20th Galway Film Fleadh, Ireland, in 72 hours. They repeated the feat with *The Ballad of Des and Mo* in the 59th Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia, and were voted into the Audience Top Ten. The team has been invited to demonstrate their model in Derry/Londonderry as part of the UK Capital of Culture 2013, upon the invitation of Oscar-nominated actor Stephen Rea.

These ground-breaking projects gave Staffordshire University the credibility to develop academic partnerships with two industry partners (Raindance in London and Filmbase in Dublin) where over 50 postgraduate students



are studying Staffordshire University film courses. The production of Filmbase's Keys To The City was embedded into the curriculum of the MSc Digital Feature Film Production in 2011/12, and their feature film premiered in Galway in July. This year will see two more films emerge from Filmbase as well as a feature drama produced by undergraduate students as part of their assessment on the Film Technology awards at Stafford.

Peter Rudge and James Fair's combined entrepreneurial drive has now seen the creation of Grand Independent, a spin-out film production and distribution company. With more than five completed feature film titles already under their belt, another in post production and three more films currently in development, they are one of the most prolific micro-budget film companies in the UK of recent years. They are continuing to develop models of sustainable production and are looking to establish a production studio model within the educational context.

Peter Rudge sees the disruption described earlier as an opportunity: 'We have an opportunity here to do something truly unique, to address those questions that have for so long been pushed aside because they are too difficult to answer. Where is the continuity of employment, the opportunities for continuing education and the vision of a sustainable career for these young filmmakers? The vision that Grand Independent has is to address these issues by turning the old system on its head. Staffordshire University students and graduates no longer have to look outside for high level work experience and no longer have to try and "break into" the film and television industries – the industry is right here.'

Grand Independent – <http://www.grandindependent.com/>

Contact James Fair at j.e.fair@staffs.ac.uk or on +44 (0)1785 353245 and Peter Rudge at p.a.rudge@staffs.ac.uk or on +44 (0)1785 353712.

Design and typesetting of this Sector Special by Tom Ward – t.ward@staffs.ac.uk / +44 (0)1782 294902.

For more information about the Centre for Applied Business Research, please contact: