



All-industry tribute to Sir Sydney

Thursday 22nd September 2011 saw a gathering of around 450 people at London's Grand Connaught rooms at a lunch organised by the British Cinema and Television Veterans as a tribute to Sir Sydney Samuelson CBE.

Everybody in the industry seemed to be there on what turned out to be the grandest of occasions, held in the luxurious surroundings of the Balmoral Suite and the Grand Hall in the Connaught rooms, the magnificent chandeliers casting a golden light on the proceedings. The occasion had taken some nine months from conception to delivery, during which time a hard working Tribute Planning Group had had to sort out all the details, including having to find a venue that could cope with the huge numbers of people who expressed an interest in attending at an early stage. Tickets were £60 each (with no freebies, we were told!) and any profits to go to charity. Generous companies from all sides of the industry had sponsored everything from the pre-lunch drinks reception to the menu cards, tickets, table decorations, wine and the audio visual services, and the lunch turned out to be extremely good, the Connaught staff coping admirably with serving such large numbers quickly and efficiently.

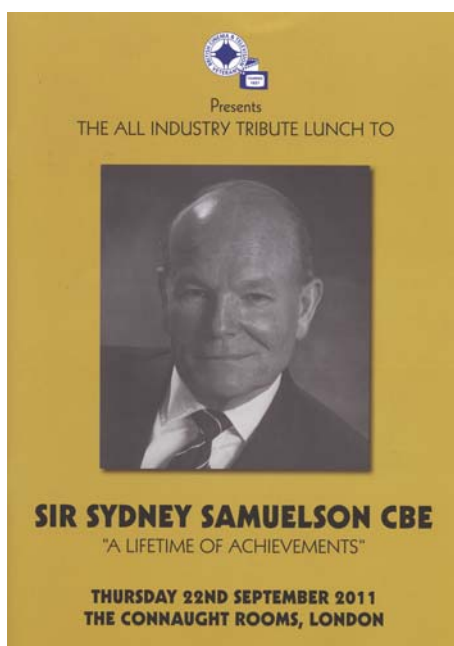
Lunch was preceded by an introduction from Anthony Williams, President of the British Cinema and Television Veterans, who said the grace before

we ate. A specially prepared 40 page printed souvenir brochure biography of Sir Sydney was provided at each table place, and it was fascinating to read about so many sides of Sir Sydney's life - most of knew something about some aspects, but few of us could have realised just how widely his influence had extended throughout our industry and the many charities which he has supported over the years. The brochure will be something to treasure.

There were 44 round tables of ten people each, with the BKSTS having a table for Council members and guests as well as a Cinema Technology Committee table, around which sat all the usual suspects. As well as all the top people from all branches of the cinema business there were lots of well-known 'celebs' to be seen, and I spotted Zoe Wanamaker and Maureen Lipman, to name but two of my favourites!

After an excellent meal, with so much talk that you wondered when it would ever stop, we were treated to a big-screen video tribute that included a 15 minute film, specially commissioned for the event by BAFTA. The film, which took several months to make, covered Sir Sydney's 86 years of life in film and featured a series of personal recollections and praise from his three sons and numerous industry associates and colleagues. It is hoped to make this film, and some other video coverage of the day, available on DVD.

Then followed an on-screen tribute from BKSTS Honorary Fellow Oswald Morris, who had worked with the Samuelsons for decades, relating tales of how they had always been ready





BKSTS Council and friends



BKSTS Cinema Technology Committee



'Ossie' Morris, BKSTS Honorary Fellow

to come up with solutions to problems, citing the Louma crane and Joe Dunton's video-assist as products that had made it possible to provide shots that had previously been unthinkable.

Sir Sydney was described as 'a very special person', and, more interestingly, perhaps, as 'someone you can always rely on to provide one of those quiet remarks from the back that cut through all the bullshit!'

The well-known and erudite Stephen Fry stepped up to the lectern, which had been dressed ready for the shooting of *Goodbye Mr Chips*, it appeared. As you would expect, Stephen provided an amusing, entertaining and interesting speech. Although he had obviously done his homework, I confess that I had been surprised when talking briefly with him beforehand to find that he is clearly something of a cinema buff, and up to date with the technologies as well, as became apparent when he casually dropped in references to 4K digital cinema and the advantages of projecting at 48fps - not what I would have expected!

Stephen gave us details of Sydney's life story and revealed much about Sydney's work that some of us hadn't known about, as well as bringing out many of the stories of his life that we had been privileged to hear at BKSTS occasions over the years.



The Newman-Sinclair camera with which the Samuelson camera-rental business began

Sir Sydney then relished the chance to thank absolutely everyone who had played a part in organising the event - he had joked earlier in the day that he wasn't supposed to have known it was happening, but he had turned up, hadn't he! He spoke of his family and the support he had always received - "How lucky can you be to get it right first time?" he asked, referring to his long and happy marriage to his wife, Doris, Lady Samuelson, who had played a major part in running the business with him.

Sir Sydney spoke of the earliest days of his starting in the camera rental business - more by accident than design, it seems, as he ended up renting out the Newman-Sinclair clockwork camera when he wasn't using it, so as to be able to keep up the monthly payments on the camera, and it was good to see the actual camera on its tripod nearby.

He took us on a tour of many of the most significant events in his career, with some notable tales of doing deals, working with both stars and filmmakers, and said that he was proud that they had been able to



Sir Sydney Samuelson at the 2009 BKSTS CTC Awards ceremony

make a contribution to the British film industry.

It was great to see that Sir Sydney so obviously enjoyed the day - he was delighted to see all his old friends and was clearly having a really happy time. This feeling tied in most appropriately with some of his closing words relating to his life and career, but which could also have applied to the tribute lunch as well - "I have loved it!" he said. And we too loved being privileged to share just a little of the wonderful life that Sir Sydney has lived and is continuing to live - 'living life to the full'.

Jim Slater

