

FILM & TV WORK

We all want to be on TV, don't we? Well, perhaps not all of us, my wife would run very fast in the opposite direction, it's true, but most folk in re-enactment are exhibitionist by nature. So, when the phone rings and the voice at the other ends dangles your fifteen minutes of statutory fame in front of your eyes, what do you do?

Think, sunshine, that's what you do. First, preferably, before you commit yourself to being in South Uist for breakfast time tomorrow with sixty fully equipped WW2 Tommies! I very seriously recommend that you make definite efforts to see the feature film "Sweet Liberty" (Alan Alda, Michael Caine etc). It points out a number of clear conflicts of interest between the film maker and the re-enactor. It is a comedy, but sobering viewing for the ordinary re-creator of history.

News, features or drama?

Although they have their uses, certainly, the press and radio are less appealing to us than film and TV, so I'll aim most of my comments at the visual media. Re-enactors attract basically three kinds of attention. The first kind is news and is easily dealt with, so we'll do that first.

Your average news researcher/editor is looking to fill a minute or so towards the end of the news. You know, those slightly tongue-in-cheek slots you see from time to time. Make a point of watching your regional news to get an idea of the slant that they use. If you've attracted attention from a more serious aspect of news reporting, you are probably trying to hide/run away/no comment anyway! If you can get yourselves on TV news, it's worth doing - so long as no damn fool tries to be amusing. "Oh, yes," said the black-leather-and-studs warrior from a Society long ago that we will not mention "Oh, yes, it's down the pub at lunch time and then out there with a sword in your 'and. Lots of blood an' guts. that's the thing." No, they certainly did not encourage such conduct amongst their membership. Yes, he did then laugh and say he was joking of course – but guess which bit of the recording got cut off and dropped on the floor? Red faces time

Just remember the golden rules for MP's and others in public life:

- Every microphone is live
- Every camera is in focus, has film in it and is running
- There is always enough light
- Every reporter has total recall
- There is no such thing as "off the record"
- The speaker does not have his finger on the editing button

Novelty? Not for me.

Not all publicity is good publicity. If your society values its image as a serious and authentic re-creator of history - and don't we all these days - DON'T agree to do any novelty shots. Filling your car with petrol, working at your desk, cycling to work and

smoking your pipe are pretty normal aren't they? Except I've seen all these shots in the press in the last few years:

- Four Viking warriors filling a mini with petrol.
- A Civil War lady on the telephone surrounded by desks and VDU's.
- A Roman Legionnaire on a mountain bike.
- A hardy, middle aged Norman knight with the right haircut - and a Condor moment.

Want to be taken seriously? Then be serious. Don't be afraid to say "No, sorry, but we won't do that" and make damn sure that every one of your members absorbs and projects this attitude through his/her boot soles from day one!

"I have the con, Spock."

Many people in the visual media are control freaks. They will tell you to do something in the clear expectation that most members of the public will do just about anything to get on TV, including eating a worm sandwich... Don't be phased by this attitude. Explain quietly and politely (and be prepared to be repetitive if needs be) that you are serious about what you do and you will not compromise the thousands of hours that your members have put into the re-creation of your particular period of history. Bear in mind that TV and film people expect to treat us as amiable and none-to-bright nutters or as extras. If you let them do that, if you let them control the image that gets broadcast to the extent that it is an unfair representation of your society, then you have no one to blame but yourself.

News Uppers.

1. It's easy, quick and facile and requires the minimum of membership input or preparation.
2. Broadcasting slots are at prime time with lots of people watching

News Downers.

1. You don't get a credit.
2. It's near-to-live, so you don't get many goes at it.
3. Mistakes and stupid remarks get broadcast.
4. If a more interesting item comes along, you get dumped – remember Drop The Dead Donkey?
5. There is virtually no chance of getting access to the uncut footage, although assiduous chasing and turning up the day after, in person, at the studio can get you the masters if you are incredibly lucky. I did it once.
6. News room tapes are often re-used immediately after edit, so two days after the item's been broadcast, it's wiped and gone for ever.
7. News people have a short attention span. If it happened yesterday, it is of absolutely no interest unless there is a possibility of a juicy follow up item.

Features and documentary work.

We are on a bit of a better wicket here. We can charge for what we do, expect a credit, get an in-depth chance to put our message across and – if the client is obliging, get eventual access to the library footage generated from the uncut camera masters. Much depends on the original agreement you make with the production

company, but even more depends on whether they thought you were decent chaps at the end of the day and worked hard for the project.

Documentaries are always under-funded and they need us! If we can get our faces in the frame, our name mentioned in the script, a healthy credit at the end, who knows what good may come of it? As they don't have lots of cash to fling about, you need to find out early in the negotiations just what their budget set-aside for you really is. If they contrive to convince you that they really are skint, don't be afraid to nail them for access to masters, spin-offs, credits, et al. An agreement (for instance) to circulate details of your society by internal mail within a big organisation like the Beeb is well worth having.

Going out on a limb for a worthwhile project in a situation where the film really could not be made without your goodwill and the efforts of your members is good for the soul - and your future: I bet the bloke who processed Spielberg's first negative free because he liked him is not going hungry, do you? You never know ...

But don't let any of 'em push you around too much. From my experience, TV/film features and drama are not quite so much into "Control, Control" as news, but they are still not used to being argued with. The role of the Extra is closely defined and they are of considerably less importance in the making of a movie than the colour of the light or the temperature of the Directors tea. But here re-enactors have a real advantage. We do what we do because we want to do it and if we are making a movie with some production company or another, it's more because we want to forward the public's interest in history than for the money. Tomorrow we will still be reenactors with a deep knowledge of a very specific period of history. But for the Director, tomorrow will find him involved with a car chase in "Cops" or half way up a mountain trying to get a salmon to leap up a run while the light lasts.

"Dark, innit?"

You need to decide how long you are going to work in a day. I'd recommend an eight hour day plus an hour for lunch as your baseline. Production companies will be expecting an indication from you & if you don't give one you will end up doing what they decide. Many will expect a ten hour day but you might be surprised to find this includes lunch. Try to wriggle round it, but from a Production point of view, it is common sense because one of the biggest time wasters is getting everyone on set and ready to work. Once make up & costume are done, it does make sense to stay in it as long as possible. Past (say) ten hours insist upon another meal break and more money.

Be reasonable & don't get cross if the shoot runs on a bit – an extra half hour is reasonable, much beyond that & your Liaison Person should be talking to the Production Manager about a further hour's money for everyone BEFORE the shoot runs into it.

"You are not listening to me!" A sensible Director etc will have sussed that he has an immense pool of free knowledge available and tap into it as far as he may - but like everybody in the world he has his position to consider when he is at work. Pre-shoot, you will find that the highest and lowest in a crew cheerfully ring you up and

ask your advice. But on-set and in costume, you are just another Extra and a long, long way down the pecking order of a film crew of perhaps seventy odd. It's a sound idea if an articulate and learned member of your society with considerable "presence" attends the shooting days as a Technical Advisor and liaison man. He should at all times remain in twentieth century civvies, but may dress in an eccentric fashion if he wishes. He will not be the only one so clad on a location shoot! ALL inter-reaction between the crew and the re-enactors MUST go through him. Such behaviour will be immediately accepted by any film crew, used as they are to their hierarchical world. And it means that the crew have only one person to brief, moan at and hide from.

He should make it clear from the outset that we are not Extras. We don't think, feel or act (small 'a') like extras. Properly treated, a team of experienced re-enactors can cut days off a shooting schedule. They will cheerfully wade through waist deep water, charge down hills with a one-in- one slope, leap off steep sand dunes in full wargear, sit in soaking wet clothes under huge jets of sea water in storm scenes and other actions (!) beyond the strict call of duty. But "being treated properly" for a reenactor is not just £xx per day, overnights and three meals a day to standard.

To feel valued, an experienced re-enactor must be allowed to exhibit their expertise in costume and personal props choice and be trusted to understand the importance of continuity etc. Another thing which is to the mutual advantage of the re-enactor and the production company is that it's likely that the re-enactors will be well used to some kind of in-house control or discipline. Utilise this aspect of what we do, it makes life a lot easier for the Director if one of the re-enactors is acting as Fourth Assistant Director (unpaid).

"Good God man, what DO you look like?"

It is pretty likely that the production company originally engaged your society as cheap specialist labour, but they will soon discover that they have a tiger by the tail and dare not let go! They will come to the conclusion that they need you as a society as you will make their product look better and cost the same as Extras. Now, this is a different ball game as they have now engaged your society because you are specialists.

I think it's important to understand just why a Costume Designer does their level best to make you look "different". It is a competitive industry staffed principally by freelancers & I can find it in my heart to feel sorry for the person who arrives at a pre-production meeting to find that the re-enactors have their feet under the table & are on first names with the Director. They need to stamp their mark on the Work or they will not only feel useless and under valued but not be able to subsequently point at that piece & say "That was MY "look" I created." Nonetheless, sympathy stops at the water's edge & don't let them modify your costume with rags and bits of tin that you know are wrong. If Costume and Props are rabid in these attempts, get the Technical Advisor to make a formal representation to the Director himself, not the 1st, 2nd or 3rd Assistant Director, you'll note. (He is the one that is in charge of the artistic interpretation of the work: the Producer has charge of the technical process of how that interpretation is arrived at. There is often some cross-over, but that's the guideline.)

If you are the TechAdv or Liaison, keep your temper and wait for your opportunity to speak to Him. Make an appointment if you need to, but make it clear you have a big problem & the bodies are stuck in Costume & not available for work until it's sorted out. Film crew are very deferential to Directors, so bear in mind that he will be unused to being crossed! Be polite but firm, explaining why and how and to what extent you are unhappy. He must value your separate and/or corporate opinion, or you would not be there. He may very well come down on your side but it is possible that he may indicate to you that he is not interested or that he intends to back props/costumes opinion. If at all possible, be prepared to compromise to save the face of Costume/Props: Will that piece of lace - however wrong it is - really show across the crowded room during a sword fight?

“Is this a walk out or a long tea break?”

In the worst case scenario, you have two alternatives. You can put up with it or you can remove yourselves from the set or location. The sudden withdrawal of all the Extras and perhaps the Walk-ons too, may be more than the Director had bargained for and climbing down from high horses may suddenly be seen as a Good Idea, probably by a third party! Normally, you see, extras are individuals, engaged separately, employed separately and paid separately. They have separate goals and aims and probably have never seen each other before today. They certainly don't think and act as one in the experience of most film crew. It will come as a terrible shock to find that the whole day's or week's filming has just gone down the drain as ALL those people that brought their own costume are taking it off and getting into their cars. What's more, they brought their own props and preparations are being made to strike the set. Argh!

If you decide to take this radical course, you must be sure of your ground and stick to your decision. All of you. Make sure you write to the boss at the Production Company immediately you get home and state why you have taken this action. Finally, bear in mind that this is a strategic nuclear weapon. i.e., it only works once and has a high devastation value. Don't expect to be loved for it, will you?

There is a middle way, however. There have been films that I've worked on where Costume and Props had some very odd ideas, even though they had been in consultation with us for weeks before the shooting. I recall in one instance I personally complained to the Director, but was told that I was an Advisor (you could hear the capitals) and I had Advised him. He wasn't making a “historical movie” (oh, yes, he bloody well was!) and the items we objected to were OK. Us re-enactors had a deep and meaningful chat and decided to see how it went, but to make some (shall we say) adjustments of our own as the shoot went along. Certain props that we objected to on grounds of authenticity were always moved out of shot by our members when the set-dressing had been completed and the Department's corporate back was turned - or conveniently distracted. Other props were sat on or stood in front of. (Once you're there in the Establishment Shot, you're there for the rest of that scene for reasons of continuity.)

“Are you sure you haven't seen the tartan cloak?”

Examples of C.R.A.P. costume (Can't Really Authenticate Properly) found their way back into the van or - in one case - were buried in the sand at the back of the crew

bus for the duration. There was even one film where we had the Principal actors sneaking up to us before shooting commenced each day and asking if their costume was alright! You have to be a bit sneaky and underhand occasionally, but it certainly makes for a brilliant esprit du corps when all the actors - principals, walk-ons and extras - are subtly imposing their interpretation on a major drama presentation. Years later, I found out that the Director was well aware of what was going on, thought we were right but could not say so for internal reasons, and so kept his trap shut.

Experienced Background Artistes (Extras posh name) are absolutely invaluable to the smooth-running of a shoot, particularly on location. Fifty people working on a set can play havoc with - for instance - continuity if they do not understand the concept. If that mug is there this time it cannot mysteriously vanish and appear somewhere else, can it? Are you sure you had that hat on in the last take? Pay attention to continuity, apart from the fact that the Continuity Girl will love you to pieces, it is a quick way to get yourselves liked as helpers and doers rather than idlers and thieves.

“Have you seen that suit of armour? Mr Wallace has come for it.”

Extras have two really bad reputations. One is for nicking the props and costume and the other is for eating all the food. DON'T nick the props or costume. It is almost certainly all hired at pretty desperate replacement costs from a major hire companies. Some of the big ones have aircraft hangers full of this stuff and make a tidy profit out of what gets - ahem - lost. It might be a bit of innocent fun to you, but it is only stealing at the end of the day and gets your whole society a bad name.

“I've filmed in Egypt, I know a plague of locusts when I see 'em”

You will be - or you certainly should be - well fed whilst filming. It is, however, an area where the grasping or poor film maker will attempt to economise. A bacon roll is NOT a cooked breakfast: Soup-and-a-bun is not an adequate lunch. BUT (and it's a big but) you have no hope of sorting it out on the day - so make sure you've got it covered in the contract. A cooked breakfast, three course lunch and sandwiches and cakes at tea time followed by dinner at the hotel are normal. This is called “Three meals a day to standard” and should form the basis of your arrangements with a production company, taking priority over other considerations.

A well-fed Extra with a cup of coffee in his hand and a refill whenever he needs it is a happy and responsive bunny - and film companies are well aware of it. A Producer of note, huddled with me beneath a voluminous cloak on a wet and windy beach pointed out that if your average extra is hungry, he will sneak away to the nearest town for a hamburger. If he is wet, cold, miserable or pissed off and doesn't have a crew bus to sit in, he will sit in the costume truck or get in the way of the lighting men or - heaven forfend - be found asleep on the floor of the director's caravan!

Don't take over-advantage of the free food. You are not part of the Persian army on its way to Greece, nor have you been trapped in a mineshaft for three weeks. Be polite and reasonable: don't go up for seconds unless you're quite certain everybody is off-set and fed. The technical crew are on set from the start of shooting until Wrap,

whereas extras get to hide in a nice warm crew bus for a good deal of the day. When - for instance – you break for lunch, the techies get fed first, usually, certainly before the Extras and it is not a rugby scrum to see who can get to the catering truck first. Extras get fed after technicians for the sound and simple reason that the technicians are needed back on set first to set the next scene. Whilst they are doing that, the extras can stuff their faces, cleaning up left overs

and licking out tins in addition to their own three-course meal. And, yes, I've seen people do this that are normally quite ordinary human beings. Please remember that you are representing your society to some extent and try to avoid acting like a pig at a trough!

“CUT! John, that's a plastic cup you're drinking from!”

Tea and coffee are generally available from a separate table equipped with huge thermos flasks. The thermo-plastic cups supplied here are a nightmare to the set-dressers, particularly in outdoor location work. Don't leave them about, stick them in a bin or sack. At the least shove them one inside another to make them heavier. Us re-enactors seem to be able to see things like this better than ordinary folk. The normal human eye seems to be tuned out to them as they are such a common sight in the twentieth century, so when they blow across shot or appear in odd corners on the set, it's often not noticed until the rushes are viewed. It would not be the first time that I've walked uninvited into a shot immediately before “action” and wordlessly removed a plastic cup that appeared in amongst the wooden and pottery vessels during the last break. Swift thinking of this kind gets you liked as it saves time, light, filmstock, battery power et al. It is not in the least amusing to notice it and leave it alone. Do your bit, help the shoot along.

Sandwiches and cream cakes for tea always seems like an open invitation to get as many eclairs down your neck as you can. Don't: you will be getting fed again later at the hotel. There, you can eat and drink to your heart's ease.

I have gone on at some length about what pigs some people make of themselves. I am quite certain that your society is the exception to the rule and none of them would behave with anything but the greatest decorum and restraint. However, Extras do have this reputation in the film industry, somoderation and polite manners get you noticed.

“We can't afford much money, I'm afraid, but we'll pay all your bus fares.”

“My People First” is a good motto to have in your head when dealing with a film company! DO NOT on any account let them stuff you up with cries of poverty & make it crystal clear that you will not do the work for a tenner a day, a packet of sandwiches and the opportunity to sleep in a wet ditch. A reasonable standard rate for non-Equity Extras is £80-£90 per person per day. (Current Equity rates are just over £100 a day at the time of writing, but check their website for up to date prices which you should expect to undercut by perhaps a tenner a day.) Your Society will be acting as a booking agent and manager, handling money, sending out information, casting Extras and Walk-ons, making phone calls and generally expending corporate energy that would have been used to do something else. Don't be afraid to charge for the efforts that the society makes on behalf of its membership.

An administration fee of £500-£800 for arranging for thirty people to be on location somewhere is not unreasonable, plus a percentage of the fee you are charging for your members as extras.

Problems will definitely arise if some people are paid more than others. The Production Company will cough up more for Walk-on parts (£150+ isn't unusual), and the society should accept it, too. But everybody should get a flat rate for film work unless you want smouldering resentment around that will last for months afterwards.

“Can I bring my whisky distiller? It’s authentic.”

If the Extra has a horse or some other specialised prop or talent, charge for it separately and make sure that everybody knows about it. If they had a horse, they could get another £100 per day, couldn't they? Bodies with firearms and licenses are worth quite a bit. I would not have thought that £150 per day plus expenses would be out of the way, I must say. Think about it for a minute: how much did your kit cost you? Not just to buy it all, but to get the relevant skills and licences. Why donate all that time, money and effort with the aim of putting VERY large sums of money into the pockets of a few people you will probably never see? These days, it's a real bummer of a feature film or major TV drama that doesn't make money, lots of it - and don't let anyone tell you different. If the offer seems insulting (I am here persuaded not to be specific, so I won't be) do just that, turn it down. If all of us re-enactors did that, the middle-men who take a fat finder's fee and cheap-jack Production Companies trying to get something for almost literally nothing - well, I won't go on, but I'm sure you get my drift.

“It’s only a short distance to fall “

If a scene calls for some daft sod to fling themselves eighty feet into a moat from a castle wall, I've no doubt you will find several of your members queuing up to do it. You can ask for lots of money for stunts, depending entirely on how dangerous/technical/difficult it is. Sometimes, you will come across a Production Company that thinks battle scenes are stunts. DON'T ARGUE! But as a rule of thumb, unless it's simple and can be done safely, I should let a stunt man do it and keep your sanity. If you do let one of your members do it, let him set his own fee (start at - say - £125 and haggle) and make sure he signs a waiver! Pass on ALL the extra money the society gets for that stunt to him. It's his neck, after all.

If asked to work with a Fight Director, be prepared to listen closely to what he tells you. You are in for a long haul, as fight direction adds hours to a shoot, but the movie will certainly be the better for the input from this professional warrior!

"There are a lot of brushes and mops in my bedroom"

In addition to money per person, you will be failing in your duty to your members unless you ask for "Three meals a day to standard, overnights and Exes." at the outset. Just this phrase will be enough to tell a Production Company that you have gathered all your excrement into one place. They will (well, I would) enquire cautiously about "Exes". You should assure them that it is only fuel expenses that you are looking for, just to get your members to the studio/location from their homes.

Make a point of saying that you calculate the rate from Post Code to Post Code. Few indeed will query that, but make sure it is in writing.

For your members, make sure they send you their petrol receipts when claiming. Revenue & Customs will allow that when working out your society's tax bill, but not Maltesers and pork pies! I leave it to you whether you chapter-and-verse that aspect of things.

"Overnights" usually mean a hotel, but if you sense that the budget is getting thin, you can offer to go B&B in guest houses, if you like. Hotels are more fun, as you will almost certainly all be in one place which is better socially in the evenings. Three star minimum and guaranteed three course English Breakfast, naturally. Ask if the Technical crew are staying in the same hotel: if they are, it's probably OK. The bar bill, newspapers and phone calls will definitely be your problem, but it's a rare Production Company that doesn't have an end-of-shooting party. As I'm writing all this from the most egalitarian of motives, I shall indulge myself with an anecdotal and episodic example or two, so there.

"Erm, you know it's a seven-thirty Call, don't you?"

Respect is hard to come by but the crew should by now admire your separate & corporate ability to re-create scenes from the past. Now it's time to impress them with your social skills. If you are in the same hotel as the crew, it is important to stay up drinking until four in the morning and be out on location, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, before the crew can get there. By that time you should have done an hour's drill practice and rehearsed the battle scene to within an inch of its life. Extra brownie points if you enthusiastically look forward to the end-of-shooting-party when you can " all get some serious drinking done." Bribe the bar manager to say loudly: "Is this all the beer there is left? Christ, where's it all going?" one evening. You know its working when the crew start to be deferential to you all.

I recall one location shoot where we arrived at the hotel at one-thirty in the morning after an all-day-and-half-the-night shoot on a freezing beach at the same latitude as Malmo in Sweden. First the techies slid off to bed at two thirty, followed shortly by the creative team. We drank the local extras under the table, leaving the crew bus driver for dead on the sofa. They were all still singing when I gave up at three and gone. The next morning, we were all up bright and early for our Full English Breakfast with seconds and out on to the frozen-solid beach to break the ice in the rock pools in wonderment. I must admit to casualties, though. One of us that had not gone to bed at all snored quietly with his face in his cornflakes while his equally sleepless companion caught flies with his head back. He made a brilliant target for screwed-up paper napkin basket ball. The crew were deeply impressed by our ability to enjoy ourselves despite the worst that befell us and it is still a matter of legend within that company (who have engaged us twice since then), I understand. It's funny the things that impress people, innit

(Surprised) "That's a good butter churn." (Pugnaciously) "It's a stonecrusher." (With resignation) "If you say so."

Props hire is pretty lucrative for societies that have taken the time to have their stuff properly made. £1,000 is a reasonable sum for the hire of a “camp’s” worth of props and set dressing for a few days work, but you must be cautious and not rely on people who are used to “real” props being able to identify that your stuff is certainly real, but only temporarily a Property. If in doubt about what to charge, work out what 15% is of what they cost to make per item, add 10% overall and try that. You can always go down ...

You must make it crystal clear that the props are - and will remain - in your charge. They will be transported by you, set up by you at the Directors discretion and moving them about will also be up to you. I’ve known overenthusiastic props men throw paint on £800 accurate replica tents to “...make them look a bit used”, put tents up wrongly so that they collapse and crack all their timbers, go through a quiver of fifty arrows, (hand drawn from native larch through a hand-forged draw plate, fletched with barred goose pinions, footed with yew and equipped with hand-forged wrought iron broad heads) and tear bits off each fletching with the comment that “They look too new”.

In the bitter row that followed, the archer to whom they belonged (gone for a pee) indicated that he would now test these damaged arrows on the vandal that had committed the crime. He was a tall, bulky, grim fellow with a dark countenance who pulled a hundred pound self yew bow as you or I might pluck up a weed. His face was dark red with anger and he was stringing his bow with what appeared to be genuinely murderous intent, the “vandal” backing away faster and faster, when the Production Manager stepped between them.

“How much per arrow?”

“What?”

“How much per arrow?”

“Get out of my way, I want to kill the little ...”

“Don’t be stupid. They are only arrows. I’m sorry he p****d you off, but he didn’t understand. How much per arrow?”

Heavy breathing. “Right. OK. Um, £50 each.”

“WHAT?!!! Give me that bloody bow ...”

Murder was avoided by the howls of laughter that followed the fast retreating back of the miscreant. Relief or what? And they did cough up for the arrows...

One angle that I have had a great deal of success with over the years is making commissioned props to the high standard that my society requires of reconstructed artefacts. The construction cost (plus 10% for contingencies) becomes the hire charge and the society ends up with another useful article for its exhibit after the filming is over.

Just a recommendation, here. On the last day of filming make sure you’ve got with you all the paperwork that appertains to the hire of the props – you ARE getting it all in writing aren’t you? Yes, well, I just thought I’d ask, some people are SO unbusinesslike - and after Wrap at the end of the shooting take some of your own people with you and remove your property at once, putting it all away in the van.

Make utterly certain you've got it all, God alone knows how much re-enactors equipment finds it way back into props departments because someone has not had the wit to remove his property IMMEDIATELY the shoot is over. Occasionally (it's happened to me once) a Props Department manager will try to retain possession of the thing you've had made specially for the job and has now become your property.

Have a receipt already written out and signed and give him this. You can show him the agreement too, if you like BUT remove it regardless of any bluster, 'cos you'll never see it after. If you are in the right, stick to your guns!

So, props hire can be a nice little earner for your society, but you must be prepared to never let any of it out of your sight. And it's not just film companies, either. I once hired some very nice shoes and pole-lathed wooden bowls etc to a major museum. You'd think you could trust a bloody museum, wouldn't you? They nailed the Ivor Lawton turnshoes through the heel into a carved oak bench and Araldited (hard-set, too) the mug into the middle of the bowl. When I complained, they retorted that they might have been stolen otherwise and I wouldn't like that, would I? Speechless!

I could tell you another cautionary tale concerning six Scottish museums, but this article is about filmwork, innit?

"Of course they only wore rags! Where would they get proper clothes?"

Hiring out costume for actors etc who are not members of your society is pretty marginal financially in my experience. You can undercut the major costume hire houses, but only by about 10% and still make a reasonable profit. In addition, if the Director wants to tear off a sleeve, cover the genuine Irish White Lawn in stage blood (which does NOT wash out properly, particularly from wool, despite anything the Make Up department will tell you), he will. You MIGHT get an extra 10-15% out of the Production Manager (handles the money, usually) afterwards, but I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you. However, it IS a good way of getting rid of some rough old kit that no-one values anymore. £50-£60 for a few day's hire hire for a full set of simple indoor clothes is about right.

If your society has a clothes and costume specialist, get them to meet the Production Company's Costume Designer as soon as you can. Even big companies often do not have an in-house specialist, and a hired-in person will be desperate to make their mark in this most competitive of industries. Therefore, you will have to come recommended from the Director Himself before they will pay serious attention to YOUR specialist. You should expect to get a fee of about £500 per specialist if they are not doing much other than advise by post, down the telephone and attending the shooting

days. Travel to pre-production meetings is, of course, extra and a fee of £35 per hour is not out of the way. We usually state that our specialist will attend a certain number of meetings as part of the fee charged, plus exes, when making the original arrangements.

“You’ve done this before, haven’t you?”

Have fun but be professional, be compliant but not complaisant, bend but don’t break, be polite but not subservient. Praise God - but keep your powder dry!

Author’s Note

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