

MODEL

for Sarah Smith,
new CGI project

talent too thin. "We
[Sony] to have a range
ad projects... we want to
hiques."

days in the relationship,
re promising that Sony
take more chances than
i.

supportive and embrac-
s British identity. They
as our selling proposi-
as a problem. They have
positively to a wide range
how a more eclectic range
ardman has done before."

Nick Park — who is cur-
rently working on a Wal-
lace and Gromit project
for TV — is plotting a
stop-frame feature with
new characters.

"The speed at which
we're developing and
have got a slate together is
unprecedented within the
company," says Smith, as
Aardman rushes ahead
with visual development,
script work and casting.
In the past, the company
has tended to make one
new feature every four or
five years. Now it may
begin to make a film a
year. "Not even Pixar can
do that," Smith says. "It's
an enormous challenge."

Other UK companies
with Hollywood back-
ers have been looking
s the Atlantic, wondering
s' strike is going to end and
zak dollar will discourage
European projects. Aard-
s, should not be affected by
e're in the happy position
because we are animation,
ne of what is going on cur-
rently affects our projects."

Writer Bill Nicholson
(left) and festival
founder David
Pearson



UNITED KINGDOM

THE THIRD WORD

With plans well underway for the third International Screenwriters' Festival (July 1-3), **MICHAEL GUBBINS** talks to founder David Pearson

Breaking into today's crowded industry calendar with a new event is a challenge. But when that event is aimed at screenwriters, it is a real achievement.

The UK town of Cheltenham is preparing to host the third International Screenwriters' Festival (July 1-3), following two very strong opening years.

To an extent, the event's success has been due to timing; over the last two or three years, writers have been re-evaluating their positions in the industry, and not liking what they see. Last year saw wide international interest in the European Screenwriters' Manifesto, and this year the Writers Guild of America is making headlines with its strike.

A sense of collective purpose has gripped this largely solitary business, and the festival has provided a perfect focus. Founder and festival director David Pearson believes there is growing interest in the industry about what writers do and, equally important, an emerging understanding of the business' among writers. Both perspectives are important because there is a big gap to be filled, says Pearson.

The event certainly champions writers and their lack of status in film: "It still amazes me how common it is for writers not to get a mention at a film festival screening. It's bizarre."

But Pearson also acknowledges the need for writers to have a wider sense of the business: "What I've noticed is that, unlike directors, writers are often isolated. They just don't know what is expected."

The festival has sought to fill that gap, not just through successful pitching

events but in providing a platform for discussion.

Pearson's perspective comes from more than 20 years as a producer, director, commissioner and writer. He became interested in film at a young age, making his first sci-fi effort as a 12-year-old, scratching special effects onto the negative with a pin. Pearson found his first professional work with BBC Television as a trainee film editor, who before long was "salvaging people's stuff that didn't work", which led him into directing.

When he left the BBC, his work brought him into the orbit of writer Jimmy McGovern (*Cracker*, *Priest*), who has been a supporter of the festival and a key influence. Pearson also devised and produced the then innovative *10x10* series, showcasing new talent, which ran for a decade.

His film company, Stroud-based Arturi Films, gave him further insight and an international perspective. He came to realise that even established writers such as McGovern, Bill Nicholson (*Shadowlands*, *Gladiator*) and Julian Fellowes (*Gosford Park*) shared the same frustrations. All have helped to organise and speak at the International Screenwriters' Festival, in which Arturi's Elizabeth Morgan Hemlock and Kenny McDonald also play a key role.

The festival is also supported by a board including chairman Simon Relph, Ken Loader, Phil Parker and Julian Friedmann plus a number of writers including Nicholson, Olivia Hetreed, Tony Grisoni and Brian Ward. Some of the biggest names in the business have spoken, and Guillermo del Toro and Peter Morgan have already signed up for 2008.

Pearson is looking for sponsors to add to the backers of this year's event, which is again supported by *Screen International*. The battle for recognition may have been won but, as every festival director knows, keeping it running remains a war.

