

Seated at his drawing-board, Max shares a joke with fellow cartoonist and draughtsman Eric Weeks.



MAX

Despite the fact that he always preferred to merge into the background, most people at Mitcheldean know or have heard of Laurence (Max) Miller of Engineering.

Jeff Kew, who worked with him at the British Acoustic Films premises in Woodger Road, London, describes him as 'a designer draughtsman of the highest quality. He could tackle the most complex of technical layouts and accompany these by any calculations and formulae. Yet he had no formal training.'

His time at Mitcheldean, which ended with his retirement on May 30, was merely a quarter of his total 47 years' service, a Company record.

Max started as an apprentice with The Gaumont Company in 1928, being keenly interested in the engineering side of cinematography (he set up a small cinema at home where he showed many films including his own).

After three months as stock-keeper, he was sent to project a film at the Motor Show, Olympia ('It was a nightmare, the film came off the reel! Another time he had to show election results on slides, suspended above diners at the Trocadero, 'if you drop anything, you'll kill someone,' he was told.

He didn't, but dismantling other equipment later in the Ritz, he cleared a table of glassware in one go with a folded screen!

In Gaumont's engineering department he learned about film camera work, visited the old Lime Grove Studios and 'got a good idea how films were taken.'

Then in 1934 he moved to BAF. Recalls Max: 'A young man walked in and said: "Don't bother to stand up — I'm nobody." That was my first meeting with Stan Pratt.'

The company were involved in the

design and assembly of film projection and magnetic sound recording equipment; then, with the onset of war, they took on Government contract work.

One of Max's contributions to the war effort was designing and preparing drawings for a full-size dummy Fairy Battle aircraft. This and others like it were displayed on airfields to mislead the enemy about the strength of our Air Force.

While 16mm projectors, searchlights and other equipment for the Services were being manufactured at the converted brewery premises at Mitcheldean, Max was kept at his drawing-board in London; for many months during the blitz he even slept under it.

The war over, J. Arthur Rank put the British film industry on the map and the company (now part of the Rank Precision Industries Group) started to design and make its own standard projection and sound equipment, with Stan Pratt as chief designer.

They were adventuring in those days.

Featured on the cover of the Nov/Dec 1966 issue of VISION, this was Max's impression of a copier suggested for use in non-electrified areas of the world. It was one of several prepared for conference use by Fred Wickstead.



and a lot of original work was done in the realm of TV, telerecording, etc. Max made a valuable contribution to the development of a portable magnetic recorder, and a fast pull-down 16mm storage camera for TV which was made at Mitcheldean for Marconi. He and Jeff Kew worked together on these and on the first 3D projectors — the audience peered through green and red spectacles to get a three-dimensional effect.

A transatlantic telefilm camera to transmit film by telephone cable to Alexandra Palace during the Queen's visit to Canada in 1959 was jointly designed by Stan Pratt and Max, who was sole draughtsman.

Sadly 1962 brought a slump and redundancy, but a place was found for Max at Mitcheldean. He joined the Drawing Office (refusing greater responsibility) and worked on the first and subsequent Xerographic equipment.

Ever inventive, he made original contributions to Engineering 'concept studies' and his name appears on several patents taken out by the Company.

We came to know Max through his cartoons, an activity he plans to carry on in retirement; and he's got 'one or two ideas to develop on the drawing-board.'

An amateur radio enthusiast since boyhood, he also likes to cycle or walk the countryside, observing wild life. The microscope from the LSA, presented to him together with a cassette recorder from Engineering, will enable him and his daughter Jane to share a closer study of nature.

We have always found Max an interesting person to listen to; he would have told this story far better himself — but he would never have done himself justice.