

Alfred Hitchcock's silent films awarded UNESCO status

10 July 2013. Alfred Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films have been added to the UNESCO UK Memory of the World Register. From Shanghai to Rio de Janeiro, from Cannes to London, Alfred Hitchcock's earliest films have been thrilling international audiences as never before, since they sensationally premiered in new BFI National Archive restorations during the London 2012 festival. All nine will screen again at BFI Southbank during August 2013.

Moscow, Bologna and Berlin are also part of a major worldwide reappraisal of Hitchcock's early films and they will screen in other major cities including Washington, San Francisco and Los Angeles as part of a US national tour..

The UNESCO UK Memory of the World Register will now feature Hitchcock's Silent Films, included alongside the Domesday Book, and other priceless items spanning nearly 900 years, which embody pivotal moments in the history of their communities and the UK as a whole. Eleven items have been selected from the UK's libraries, archives and museums to represent the outstanding heritage of the United Kingdom.

This is the third group of inscriptions to the UNESCO UK Memory of the World Register, an online catalogue created to help promote the UK's documentary heritage across the UK and the world. The register is part of a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) programme to support and raise awareness of archives.

The UK Register is available at www.unesco.org.uk/ukregister.

"This year's inscriptions reflect the richness of UK culture and history, from medieval manuscripts to ground breaking cinema," said David Dawson, Chair of the UK Memory of the World Committee. "We hope that today's announcement will encourage people to discover these items and collections, as well as some of the other great documentary heritage near them."

Robin Baker, Head Curator, BFI National Archive said, "We are very pleased to see that the early films from one of the world's best known film-makers are taking their place alongside some of the greatest cultural artefacts of the United Kingdom. Film culture is too often overlooked in summaries of British cultural heritage. We are delighted that Hitchcock's first nine films, all silent, are now inscribed in the UNESCO UK Memory of the World Register. The BFI National Archive's painstaking restorations are attracting not only new audiences around the world but the acclaim of the international community as important works of world cultural note."

This year's inscriptions join the thirty items and collections currently on the UK Register. The winners were chosen by the expert committee of the UK Memory of the World programme following a nomination and review process.

The official inscription reads as follows:

Hitchcock's Silent Films – British Film Institute National Archive, London

While Alfred Hitchcock is one of the most famous film directors of all time, his first ten silent films – nine of which survive – are little known compared to his later work. These films are among the greatest achievements of British silent cinema, and are blueprints for the rest of his body of work.

For further information on each item, including pictures, visit www.unesco.org.uk/ukregister.

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Notes to Editors

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THE HITCHCOCK 9: (release dates 1926 - 1929)

The Pleasure Garden (Mar 1926)

The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog (Sep 1926)

Downhill (May 1927)

Easy Virtue (Aug 1927)

The Ring (Sep 1927)

The Farmer's Wife (Mar 1928)

Champagne (Aug 1928)

The Manxman (Jan 1929)

Blackmail (Aug 1929) – silent version

Hitchcock's *The Mountain Eagle* – the tenth of his silent films – is still missing and is top of the BFI's Most Wanted list.

www.bfi.org.uk/nationalarchive/news/mostwanted/mountain-eagle.html

The surviving nitrate materials for these films bear the marks of wear and tear over the decades. It is only thanks to new advances in digital technology that the BFI's team of technical experts have been able to bring the earliest surviving materials together and restore Hitchcock's early films to extraordinary effect.

The Pleasure Garden (1926) was Hitchcock's debut feature film and is the first restored silent film to be presented as part of *The Genius of Hitchcock*. The film has never been fully restored and has been available only as a screening print with one tinted scene. The BFI has restored a full range of tints as well as removing dirt and damage, and added a significant amount of extra footage. The film's opening sequence uncannily anticipates many of the elements that characterised Hitchcock's later work and was confidently 'signed' by Hitchcock with a handwritten signature on the opening credits, characteristically defending his decision: "Actors come and actors go, but the name of the director should stay clearly in the mind of the audiences".

Principal funding for this film restoration was provided by The Hollywood Foreign Press Association and The Film Foundation.

The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog (1926)

Hitchcock's third feature is what he called the first true 'Hitchcock' film, and was described as "the finest British production ever made" by the trade journal *Bioscope*. His first suspense thriller, it's about a mysterious lodger who might also be a serial killer terrorising fog-shrouded London - and, much as he would later do with Cary Grant in *Suspicion* (1941), Hitchcock cannily cast matinee idol Ivor Novello in the title role and challenged his audience to think the worst of him. Visually, it was extraordinarily imaginative for the time, most notably in the scene in which Hitchcock installed a glass floor so that he could show the lodger pacing up and down in his room from below, as though overheard by his landlady. The new restoration of the print is a remarkable transformation and has a far crisper image.

Principal funding for this film restoration was provided by The Hollywood Foreign Press Association and The Film Foundation.

***Downhill* (1927)**

This film has also never been fully restored by the BFI National Archive and a tinted print from the EYE Film Institute, Amsterdam has proved a key supplementary reference for the restoration. *Downhill* is the first pure example of Hitchcock's much-revisited 'wrong man' plot, although it lacks the element of pursuit that drives more familiar examples like 1935's *The 39 Steps*. Novello again, here performing his own stage play, plays (somewhat implausibly at 34) model school student Roddy, falsely accused of getting a young woman pregnant. Expelled and disgraced, Roddy goes into self-imposed exile, reduced to renting himself out as a companion to lonely, wealthy women before winding up destitute and ill in Marseilles.

***Easy Virtue* (1927)**

Based on Noël Coward's stage hit, *Easy Virtue* offers another early example of one of Hitchcock's favourite themes, the 'wrong man' (or in this case woman), forced to become an outsider because of universally presumed guilt. After *The Mountain Eagle* this is the Holy Grail for early Hitchcock scholars. Although only known to exist on 16mm in relatively poor condition, the surviving material has been improved digitally and the film deserves to be better known.

***The Ring* (1927)**

Hitchcock claimed that, after *The Lodger*, this is the next 'Hitchcock' picture. The story is a love triangle between a fairground boxer whose lover falls for the charms of a professional fighter. This is Hitchcock's one and only original screenplay but its neatness and economy confirmed him as Britain's leading filmmaker of his generation. Brilliantly evocative scenes set in the Royal Albert Hall underline Hitchcock's love of London landmarks.

***The Farmer's Wife* (1928)**

Hitchcock was worried that the stage roots of *The Farmer's Wife* (a hugely popular play by Eden Philpotts) might show through in his film adaptation. It was a needless worry. This semi-comic story of a widowed farmer's attempts to find himself a new wife is shot, as Truffaut observed, 'like a thriller'. The camera, on occasion handled by Hitch himself, observes the action cinematically, not from the perspective of a stage audience. Each prospective wife – the horsy one, the hysterical one, the high-spirited one – is presented as a comic stereotype. Rejected by each, the farmer ultimately discovers what, or rather who, has been literally staring him – and the audience – in the face all the time: his young, attractive and devoted housekeeper.

***Champagne* (1928)**

Hitchcock's second release of 1928 is an uncharacteristically slight comedy about a millionaire's decision to put an end to his frivolous daughter's engagement with an unsuitable suitor by feigning bankruptcy. *Champagne* contains flashes of Hitchcock brilliance, with witty shots through a champagne glass and a disturbing sequence in which the feckless heroine (the frothy Betty Balfour) imagines herself sexually assaulted by the man who (as it ultimately emerges) has been employed by her father to spy on her. The deftly observed voyeurism by this and other characters is another emblematic Hitchcock touch.

Restoration of this film was supported by The Eric Anker-Petersen Charity.

***The Manxman* (1929)**

The Manxman was to be Alfred Hitchcock's last silent film, and, in the event, one of the best and most mature works of his early career. Adapted from a novel by Sir Hall Caine, a once-celebrated author who specialised in stories set on the Isle of Man, the film was partially, and beautifully, shot on location, albeit in Cornwall. Set in a small fishing community, two boyhood friends take markedly differing paths in adulthood, but still manage to fall in love with the same woman. Tragedy inevitably ensues. Thematic anticipations of the director's later work abound, from Gregory Peck's tormented-in-love barrister in *The Paradine Case* (1947) to Kim Novak's would-be suicide in *Vertigo* (1958), although such observations should not detract from appreciating the film's own merits, not least the superlative lead performances.

***Blackmail* (1929)**

Through its mixture of location filming and roster of believable working-class characters, Hitchcock's seminal thriller (made in both sound and silent versions) also succeeds as a rich evocation of London life. From its opening sequence with the police tracking down a wanted criminal (encompassing location and studio shooting), through scenes on the London Underground (studio), Whitehall (location), the Lyon's Tea House at Piccadilly Circus (location), and on to the climactic chase in and atop the British Museum (location and studio), the film successfully eludes its theatrical origins. A highpoint in Hitchcock's early career, and of British silent cinema, the director would later revisit and surpass the knife murder in *Blackmail* with those featured in both *The 39 Steps* (1935) and, most famously, *Psycho* (1960).

Working from the original nitrate negative, preserved in the BFI National Archive has produced an extraordinary improvement in clarity of the image.

Principal funding for this film restoration was provided by The Hollywood Foreign Press Association and The Film Foundation.

***The Pleasure Garden* (1926), *Blackmail* (1929), *The Ring* (1927) and *The Lodger* (1926)** were presented with specially commissioned scores in a series of spectacular screenings in venues across the capital in June and July 2012 as part of the London 2012 Festival.

It is only with the generous support of so many individuals, trusts and foundations and corporate partners that the restoration of Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films was made possible for this comprehensive retrospective. Special thanks must go to everyone who has supported the BFI's Rescue the Hitchcock 9 campaign, including: The Eric Anker-Petersen Charity; Arts Council England; British Board of Film Classification; James Dalton; Deluxe 142; Shivendra Singh Dungarpur; The Mohamed S. Farsi Foundation; The Film Foundation; Daniel & Joanna Friel; Pia Getty; The Headley Trust; Simon W Hessel; The Hollywood Foreign Press Association; Ian & Beth Mill; Col & Karen Needham; PRS for Music Foundation; Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation; Martin Scorsese; Ronald Terry Shedlo; and Matt Spick.

Notes to editors

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the largest collection of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films. With specialist storage facilities in Warwickshire and Hertfordshire the archive also boasts significant collections of stills, posters and designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera. We are funded partly by OfCom as the official archive for ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five. We record a representative sample of television across Britain's terrestrial channels and are the official archive of moving image records of Parliament.

BFI Mediatheques

Anyone can get access to collections of over 2000 titles from the archive for free at BFI Mediatheques around the UK, currently at BFI Southbank, BFI National Library, QUAD Derby, Central Library Cambridge, Wrexham Library and Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

BFI National Archive Online

Our YouTube channel **BFI Films** has over 426 items which can be viewed online. [Over 1.5 million views have been recorded for *Alice in Wonderland* (1903) uploaded to coincide with the release of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*]. Academic access for higher education is through the **BFI InView** project. Schools and educational institutions have access to a wide range of material at **screenonline.org.uk**. This is in addition to paid access at the BFI for other research needs.

BFI Films

12,000 prints a year are loaned out by the BFI National Archive to support the programmes of 800 venues across the UK and overseas and our DVD label regularly issues selected items. These have included the hugely popular British Transport Films Collection series, the legendary documentaries of The GPO Film Unit, the collections of the Central Office of Information, *Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-War Britain 1951 – 1977* and *Steel* – a survey of Britain's steel-making heritage on film.

About The Film Foundation

Since 1990, The Film Foundation (www.film-foundation.org), a non-profit organisation established by Martin Scorsese, has been dedicated to protecting and preserving motion picture history by providing substantial annual support for preservation and restoration projects at the leading film archives. The foundation raises awareness of the urgent need to preserve films and has helped to save over 550 motion pictures. The Film Foundation is also teaching over 9 million middle and high school students how to "read" film through its unique educational curriculum, *The Story of Movies*. Joining Scorsese on the board of directors are: Woody Allen, Paul Thomas Anderson, Wes Anderson, Francis Ford Coppola, Clint Eastwood, Curtis Hanson, Peter Jackson, Ang Lee, George Lucas, Alexander Payne, Robert Redford and Steven Spielberg. The Film Foundation is aligned with the Directors Guild of America whose President and Secretary-Treasurer serve on the Foundation's board.

About Deluxe 142

Deluxe 142 are a wholly owned subsidiary of Deluxe Entertainment Services Group Inc. and are a leading provider of Restoration, Digital Media and Post Production Services in the UK. The restoration department team cutting edge technologies and techniques with highly skilled technicians to provide restoration and preservation solutions to some of the world's most prestigious archives.

- **UNESCO's Memory of the World programme** was established in 1992 to promote preservation of and access to the world's archive holdings and library collections. The vision of the programme is a simple but powerful one – the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance.

The UK Memory of the World Register was established in 2010 to highlight documentary heritage which holds cultural significance specific to the UK. The Register is managed by the UK Memory of the World Committee, a group of independent experts in relevant fields. The UK Register complements the UNESCO Memory of the World International Register, which is a catalogue of documentary heritage of global significance and outstanding universal value.

In addition to maintaining Registers the Memory of the World programme raises awareness of documentary heritage and the need for preservation activities among governments, the general public, business and commerce. The programme also raises funds and provides expertise to support preservation and digitisation projects in developing countries and for archives at risk.

- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC)** oversees and coordinates UNESCO programmes and initiatives in the UK, including the Memory of the World Programme. As an independent organisation it brings together a network of experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. It works in partnership with UK Government, UK civil society and UNESCO, focusing on:
 - Independent policy advice to government in the fields of UNESCO's competence;
 - Supporting the government's reform and effectiveness agenda at UNESCO;
 - Providing advice and support to UK individuals and institutions seeking UNESCO accreditation and nominations.

***** PICTURE DESK *****

A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting the screenings

can be found at www.image.net under BFI / BFI Southbank/ August 2013