

Missing British, wartime film rediscovered.

Welcome Mr. Washington (1944)

returns to BFI National Archive



Peggy Cummins with Martita Hunt in Welcome Mr. Washington (1944)

London - Thursday 14 January 2016. *Welcome Mr Washington* directed by Leslie Hiscott (1944), a wartime film starring Peggy Cummins has been rediscovered. It was last seen in the UK on television in 1961. Since then the film has been missing, presumed lost and was on the BFI's Most Wanted Films list issued in 2010 to mark the 75th anniversary of the BFI National Archive.

Peggy Cummins, star, has just seen the film at a private screening, the first time since 1944, and just in time for her 90th birthday.

The 16mm re-released print of *Welcome Mr. Washington* was discovered by an eagle-eyed film enthusiast in the Cinema Museum collection in London. The BFI acquired this print, then, during discussions with Paramount it emerged that they too had a print, also 16mm and also cut for re-release. So while it's unfortunate that the full-length version doesn't appear to exist, there is now a version of this light, warm-hearted Home Front tale in the BFI National Archive with a sparkling performance performance by star Peggy Cummins.

Peggy Cummins said, "I am absolutely delighted to be able to see this early film of mine again. It was at a key stage in my career and it was very important to me. I am very pleased that the film has been brought back to the BFI. I'm also very grateful for the effort the BFI has gone to in order to bring the film back to the screen."

Welcome Mr. Washington will be screened on 29th & 31st January 2016 as the climax of a BFI Southbank season of films exploring Britain in the Second World War. On 31st January Peggy Cummins will introduce the screening. The BFI Southbank season is complemented by a major new collection Home Front on BFI Player which includes which includes many rare and previously unseen titles, newly available.

The print of *Welcome Mr. Washington* was digitised by Paramount, then using funds from the Unlocking Film Heritage project the film's clean up and transfer to DCP was completed for its first major public screening in about 70 years.

Andrea Kalas, VP Archives, Paramount Pictures said, "Collaborations between archives are key to finding and preserving film. The Paramount Archives is thrilled to have located this film which is now formerly on the BFI's "Most Wanted" list."

Robin Baker, Head Curator, BFI National Archive said, "The rediscovery of a 'lost' British film is always cause for celebration, but goes to underline quite how fragile our film and TV heritage is. It's great to be able to be able to present this charming wartime drama featuring the wonderful Peggy Cummins. It's an important addition to the riches of our holdings of the cinema of WW2. Thanks to Paramount Archives and the Cinema Museum for all their help."

For audiences eagerly awaiting the release of *Dad's Army* next month, there's a chance to discover the world of Britain's Home Front (mostly for free) with a special collection of wartime treats, from Ministry of Information shorts on how to make your rations go further, the joys of dried eggs or rabbit pie, how to recycle scrap metal, instructional documentaries on how to save money or tips to avoid getting lice to great feature classics including *Millions Like Us* (1943) and many more.

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/collections/the-home-front/>

In addition *Ration Books and Rabbit Pies: Films from the Home Front*, a new BFI DVD collection brings together a selection of public information films, propaganda shorts and adverts from the Second World War, drawn from the BFI National Archive - released on 18 January 2016, it contains films that give essential advice to a nation living in an age of austerity.

Notes on *Welcome Mr. Washington* (1944)

Adapted from a story by popular children's author Noel Streatfeild, the film blended topicality with whimsy and featured star Peggy Cummins in an early role.

Like Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale*, which was also released in 1944, *Welcome Mr Washington* showed US soldiers in a small village and the romantic possibilities which ensue. Contemporary reviews agreed that the script, by future James Bond writer Jack Whittingham, contained sharp dialogue and that the tension between the villagers and the soldiers was very plausible. An added bonus, according to *Motion Picture Herald*, was that "the American officers, to most critics' complete astonishment, talk and look like Americans." Dedicated to fostering good Anglo-American relations, the film also featured more subtle messages about the importance of farming for the country and the dangers gossip could pose to the community.

Synopsis:

The Monthly Film Bulletin, May 1944:

"Jane Willoughby and her young sister, Sarah, are left almost entirely penniless on their father's death; but rather than leave their ancestral home, Bishop's Knole, they stay on and farm the land. American troops are sent to convert part of the estate into an airfield, and chose the land belonging to Selby, an odious tenant-farmer, who is the girls' enemy and believes they have arranged it. Officers are billeted at Bishop's Knole, and Lieutenant Johnny Grant falls in love with Jane, while Sarah imagines herself in love with Captain Abbott. Selby and the vindictive postmistress, Miss Finch, do their best to incite the villagers against the girls, and the culmination comes at a village meeting when Selby makes public a cable from Johnny's father telling him to start a factory on the land after the war, and the farmer declares that they will all be dispossessed and foreign labour brought in. Jane and Johnny arrive in time to explain that their one idea is to make work and prosperity for the villagers, who are happily won round and duck Selby in the millpond. All ends happily for Johnny and Jane; but Captain Abbott makes it clear to Sarah that she must wait another five years for romance."

Reviews

The Monthly Film Bulletin commented that *Welcome Mr Washington* was "a well-directed, pleasant film, with a strong supporting cast, and provides entertainment about the war from a quieter and more humorous angle than usual."

Kinematograph Weekly went further, proclaiming "the birth of a very brilliant young star, Peggy Cummins," celebrating the film as "a thoroughly entertaining impression of English village life and 'not-so-innocents' abroad," And praising the way "it tenderly illustrates the joys and disillusionments of adolescents and gives our American visitors a well-timed pat on the back."

Credits

Director Leslie Hiscott

Production Company Shaftesbury Films

Producer Jack Whittingham

Original Story Noel Streatfeild

Screenplay Elizabeth Hiscott

Photography Gerald Gibbs

Cast: Barbara Mullen (Jane Willoughby), Donald Stewart (Lieutenant Johnny Grant), Peggy Cummins (Sarah Willoughby), Leslie Bradley (Captain Abbott), Roy Emerton (Selby), Graham Moffat (Albert), Martita Hunt (Miss Finch), Danny Green (Hank)

TICKETS FROM WWW.BFI.ORG.UK/SOUTHBANK

Under 16s £6, adults £11.75,
(Members pay £1.50 less)

Peggy Cummins biographical note

Growing up in Dublin she began her career as a child actress at the Gate Theatre. She made her film debut in *Dr O' Dowd* (d. Herbert Mason, 1940) but it was her London stage successes in 'Junior Miss' and 'Alice in Wonderland' that convinced Twentieth Century-Fox mogul Darryl F. Zanuck to offer her a seven year contract and the lead in *Forever Amber* (US, 1947). However, after shooting several scenes, she was replaced by Linda Darnell.

Recovering from this setback, she made her Hollywood debut for Joseph L. Mankiewicz in *The Late George Apley* (US, 1947) and returned to Britain for another Mankiewicz picture, *Escape* (1948). Her last American film was her finest, as an archetypal femme fatale in Joseph H. Lewis' film noir *Gun Crazy* (1950).

Back in Britain she played Edward G. Robinson's daughter in *My Daughter Joy* (d. Gregory Ratoff, 1950) and a policewoman in *Street Corner* (d. Muriel Box, 1953), after which she primarily played light romantic leads. More challenging roles were few and far between; the exceptions were *Hell Drivers* (d. Cy Endfield, 1957) and *Night of the Demon* (d. Jacques Tourneur, 1957). Her final role was in a 1965 episode of *The Human Jungle* (ITV, 1963-65).

Limited interview time available. Please contact the BFI Press Office.

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead organisation 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
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Greg Dyke.

About the BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive was founded in 1935 and has grown to become the one of the largest and most important collections of film and television in the world with over 180,000 films and 750,000 television programmes. For over 80 years the BFI has been an international leader in film preservation and guardian of Britain's unparalleled film and TV heritage. The BFI is an innovator in presenting films to audiences in new and dynamic ways, from cinemas to film festivals, outdoor events to online video-on-demand. At the heart of all its activities is the BFI's central aim to ensure that everyone in the UK has access to the widest possible range of film and their own film heritage.

That heritage includes all time great British directors Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean and Powell and Pressburger; and the rich vein of documentary filmmaking, in which Britain led the world, including the lyrical work of Humphrey Jennings. The archive also boasts a significant collection of filmmakers' papers as well as extensive stills, posters and production and costume designs along with original scripts, press books and related ephemera.

Expert teams undertake the time-consuming and complex task of restoring films at the BFI John Paul Getty Jr Conservation Centre in Hertfordshire. The BFI's most precious film materials are kept in optimum conditions in the world-leading Master Film Store in Warwickshire.

Stills

A selection of stills for press use in connection with this story can be found at:
[www.image.net/BFI/BFI National Archive/Welcome Mr. Washington](http://www.image.net/BFI/BFI%20National%20Archive/Welcome%20Mr.%20Washington)

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