



PRESS RELEASE
3 November 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

09/66

Early Christmas present from BFI: 'A Christmas Carol' on YouTube

As the world prepares for the frenzy surrounding the arrival of seasonal blockbuster **Disney's A Christmas Carol** (2009), the BFI National Archive launches the first ever film version of the tale, made in 1901, on its YouTube channel www.youtube.com/BFIfilms

Produced by British silent pioneer R.W. Paul and directed by W R Booth, **Scrooge or Marley's Ghost** pares down the action to its bare bones featuring a brief scene with Scrooge scolding Bob Cratchit for leaving the office followed by several encounters with the ghost of Marley. This delightful black and white film offers a powerful insight into the early days of British cinema and boasts some entertaining special effects which still pack a punch today.

Will Scrooge beat Santa Claus?

There are over 200 items from the BFI National Archive on the BFI's YouTube channel which have attracted almost 3 million hits since launching without any fanfare in September 2007. The statistics reveal a huge hunger for archive films. More than 437,000 people have viewed G.A.Smith's **Santa Claus** (1898) and other popular treasures include **The Mystery of Marriage** (1932), an educational short explaining the facts of life or **Nude Woman by a Waterfall** (1920) an experimental tinted short.

Scrooge or Marley's Ghost is featured on the BFI DVD **R.W. Paul: The Collected Films 1895-1908** which offers a unique compilation of the pioneer filmmaker famous for his trick films. Paul was a prolific filmmaker whose work is, unfairly, not nearly as well known as foreign contemporaries such as Georges Méliès, with whom his work has a lot in common. It is also featured on another BFI DVD **Dickens Before Sound**, a collection of silent cinema featuring Dickens' plots.

Notes to editors:

1. **Scrooge or Marley's Ghost (UK, 1901)** 4 mins

Ewan Davidson writing for the BFI's educational reference resource www.screenonline.org.uk describes it thus:

"Produced by the English movie pioneer R.W. Paul, this version of *A Christmas Carol* is the earliest surviving adaptation of Dickens' work on film. The only known print, held by the BFI, is incomplete, but manages to tell enough of the story for it to be recognisable. As so often in the cinema's early days, the filmmakers chose to adapt an already well-known story, assuming the audience's familiarity with the tale meant less need for excessive inter-titles.

There is evidence to suggest that Paul's version of *A Christmas Carol* was based as much on J. C. Buckstone's popular stage adaptation as on Dickens' original story. In common with the play, the film dispenses with the different ghosts that visit Scrooge and instead relies upon the figure of Marley, draped in a white sheet, to point out the error of Scrooge's ways.

Although somewhat flat and stage-bound to modern eyes, this first cinematic excursion into Dickens' most popular tale was an ambitious undertaking at the time. Not only did it attempt to tell an 80 page story in five minutes, but it featured impressive trick effects, superimposing Marley's face over the door knocker and the scenes from his youth over a black curtain in Scrooge's bedroom. Paul was a trick film specialist and Walter Booth - credited with the film's direction - was a well-known magician."

The surviving fragment of this film can be downloaded in its entirety from the BFI's Creative Archive. It can be accessed by anyone within the UK under the terms of the Creative Archive Licence.

Synopsis: Scrooge berates Bob Cratchit as the clerk leaves the office. Arriving home, Scrooge is startled by a vision of Marley's Ghost in the door knocker. Inside, Scrooge draws the curtains. The Ghost appears to Scrooge once more, and conjures up visions of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet To Come.

2. The BFI National Archive is the world's most significant collection of film and television with more than 210,000 films and over 675,000 television programmes. Its collections also include original scripts, posters, pressbooks and the private papers of more than 600 key individuals such as Sir David Lean, Joseph Losey, Derek Jarman, Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, John Schlesinger and others.

Free access to the moving image collections can be gained by visiting the BFI Mediatheques (BFI Southbank, QUAD Derby and Cambridge Central Library).

Touring cinema programmes and DVD releases also allow significant access opportunities.

3. From **Wednesday 4 November**, the BFI IMAX presents **Disney's A Christmas Carol An IMAX 3D Experience**, a new version of the classic Dickens tale from filmmaker Robert Zemeckis (*Polar Express*, *Forest Gump*). The film features the talents of Jim Carrey, Gary Oldman and Colin Firth and has been digitally re-mastered for the unparalleled image and sound quality of IMAX 3D.

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