



7<sup>th</sup> September 2011

**BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL ARCHIVE GALA SCREENING  
WORLD PREMIERE OF  
BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE RESTORATION:  
The First Born (1928) dir. Miles Mander**

**Rediscovery of a stunning late 1920s melodrama**



The BFI National Archive's gala presentation at the BFI 55<sup>th</sup> London Film Festival, in partnership with American Express, is the world premiere of a new BFI restoration of *The First Born* (1928), directed by Miles Mander. This little known, but deeply satisfying, British drama will screen at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2011, 7.30pm.

Director Miles Mander, who wrote the original stage play and co-authored the screenplay, also stars as a badly behaved aristocrat opposite Madeleine Carroll as his wife. Mander's co-writer on the screenplay was Alma Reville (Mrs Alfred Hitchcock). The story is a late twenties melodrama of great sophistication and offers a fascinating insight into the scandalous real-life exploits of the colourful Miles Mander.

There are moments strongly reminiscent of early Hitchcock, perhaps unsurprising as Alma Reville was heavily involved with the preparation of the scenario. Could it be that the famous 'Hitchcock touch' is as much to do with Mrs, as with Mr? Audiences must judge for themselves.

The film is a surprisingly adult account of Sir Hugo Boycott's (Mander) passionate but rocky marriage to Madeleine, his beautiful but somewhat naive wife. Failing to conceive the heir he craves, she resorts to desperate measures to tempt back her philandering husband. Set in the world of high society and the political classes, a world well known to Mander, among whose distinguished family were several Liberal MP's, the film throws the hypocrisies and double standards of its members into sharp relief.

There are other fascinating resonances between the plot and real life, as the first-born in the film is played by Mander's own son, and it was fairly well known that Mander and his co-star were romantically involved. Mander was also married at one point to an Indian princess called Pretty (his brother married her sister). Mander had lived a life worthy of several films, losing a fortune as an over-enthusiastic gambler while a young man, and then working as a sheep hand in New Zealand when family pressures forced him to a more disciplined environment. He amused himself as a daredevil, pioneer aviator and later worked for the Air Auxiliary Corps during the First World War. Novelist, playwright, film director, actor – there seemed no end to his talents and his ability to take on whatever role he chose and succeed in it. His acting career led him to Hollywood where he became a mainstay as a popular character actor. He eventually ended up a radio host.

Heather Stewart, Creative Director, BFI said, *"The BFI London Film Festival Archive Gala gives us an opportunity to showcase important restorations from the BFI National Archive. These enable us to highlight lesser known or previously unavailable works which deserve to be widely seen and The First-Born is a tour-de-force of late silent film-making. New restoration techniques and digital technology give us the chance to give a new lease of life to the rich heritage of British cinema."*

### **Technical background to the BFI restoration**

The BFI National Archive acquired a nitrate positive of *The First Born* in 1939 as an example of the work of its writer, director and star, Miles Mander. The print, which we still have, is tinted and we have created a new print using a combination of new photochemical and digital restoration.

The current running time of the BFI's original material is 6942ft @22fps = 84 mins of 94 advertised at the original trade show in 1928. With no surviving script that we know of, and no records concerning the film with the heirs of the production company, we can't tell what the missing footage may have contained and can only work with the prints that survive. Using a 16mm abridged version courtesy of our colleagues at the George Eastman House, we have found several missing shots and jump cuts. Although this 16mm copy has been abridged, as is common for 16mm versions, it does in fact contain several short scenes and longer shots not in our 35mm material and has been invaluable as a guide to the correct sequencing of some scenes. Matching the 16mm material, which is of inferior picture quality, with the 35mm nitrate original has been a considerable challenge for the

graders. We scanned the original nitrate and the dupe negative as well as the 16mm print and selected which shots should be taken from which source. Decisions were then made about tinting based directly from the evidence of the tinted nitrate print. The tinting is understated and subtle – amber for lit interiors and violet for evening shots.

## Music

This world premiere screening will be accompanied by musician Stephen Horne who will be performing his newly commissioned score with Janey Mercer and Martin Pyne. Horne is one of a small but dedicated group of specialist accompanists to silent film. He works regularly at BFI Southbank and is much in demand at film festivals around the world.

Stephen Horne's credits include scores and performance on a series of key BFI releases including: *A Cottage on Dartmoor*, *Primitives and Pioneers*, *RW Paul: the Collected Films*, *Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Sports*, and *Tales from the Shipyard*.

[www.stephenhorne.co.uk](http://www.stephenhorne.co.uk)

## Credits

Production Company: Gainsborough Studios

Producers: M Woolf, Michael Balcon

Director: Miles Mander

Scenario: Alma Reville, Miles Mander

Photography: Walter Blakeley

Editor: Arthur Tavares

Cast: Miles Mander (Sir Hugo Boycott, Bt.); Madeleine Carroll (Madeleine, his wife); John Loder (David, Lord Harborough); Margot Armand (Sylvia Finlay); Ella Atherton (Mme. Nina de Landé); Ivo Dawson (Derek Finlay)

Music composed and performed by Stephen Horne

Tinted print restored by BFI National Archive running time 88 mins

Restoration credits: BFI National Archive; Deluxe; with thanks to Simon Hessel, George Eastman House

“British cinema of the 1920s is a pleasure garden that has remained locked for eighty years. Some of its blooms have died of neglect. The rest remain as fresh as they were when British cinemagoers were first thrilled by their gorgeous spectacle.” *Broadcaster, Matthew Sweet in his preface to the BFI's groundbreaking Twenties season in 2004*

**Bryony Dixon**, curator, Silent Film, BFI National Archive is available for interview by arrangement. Author of **100 Silent Films** (BFI Publishing, 2011) and programmer of the British Silent Film Festival, Bryony Dixon is an internationally acknowledged expert on cinema of the silent period. She is currently working on the BFI's major project for the Cultural Olympiad 2012, the restoration of Alfred Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films, including *The Pleasure Garden* (also starring Miles Mander).

**For further information please contact:**

**Judy Wells, Head of Press and PR, BFI**  
[judy.wells@bfi.org.uk](mailto:judy.wells@bfi.org.uk) 02079578919/07984180501

**Brian Robinson, Communications Manager, Archive and Heritage, BFI**  
[brian.robinson@bfi.org.uk](mailto:brian.robinson@bfi.org.uk)/02079578940

### **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 filmmakers 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 and Wrexham Library, and Discovery Museum, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

### **BFI National Archive Online**

Our YouTube channel **BFIFilms** has over 400 items which can be viewed online. [Over 1,100,000 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](http://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*, *Tales from the Shipyard: Britain's shipbuilding heritage on film* and *The Great White Silence*, the official film record of Scott's ill-fated Polar expedition.

## Notes to editors:

### Miles Mander

Lionel Henry Mander (1888 –1946) took the name 'Miles Mander' for professional use in many roles as variously an actor, playwright, film director and radio journalist. The Mander family were prominent figures in Wolverhampton, Staffordshire and he was brought up in some splendour at Wightwick Manor. Sir Geoffrey Mander MP was his older brother. Educated at Harrow, Loretto (in Canada) and McGill University he worked as a sheep farmer in New Zealand in 1908; early career in flying Bleriot planes at Pau in 1909; first official flight at Brooklands in 1910; founded Hendon aerodrome in 1910; free balloonist 1912; during First World War he served as Captain in the Royal Army Service Corps; from 1920 he began an extensive international film career; he starred in Alfred Hitchcock's directorial debut, *The Pleasure Garden* (1926) before taking on his own first feature *The First Born* (1928) and has credits on over 100 films. Standing as a prospective Labour Parliamentary candidate for Putney in 1934 he failed to win the seat and later went to Hollywood where his film career blossomed. His first wife was Princess Prativa Devi, daughter of the Maharajah Nripendra Narayan of Cooch Behar. His second wife Kathren ('Bunty') French, of Sydney, Australia, bore him a son, Theodore for whom he wrote a book of advice and memoir, *To My Son—in Confidence* (1934). He died of heart attack in 1946 while dining at the Brown Derby restaurant in Los Angeles.

### Madeleine Carroll

Internationally renowned Hollywood actress who is probably best known for her role in Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps*. Born in West Bromwich she graduated from Birmingham University before becoming a stage actress. Her first film role was in *The Guns of Loos* in 1928 and her second film was the starring role in *The First Born*. Her career in England took off with films such as *I Was a Spy* and *School of Scandal*. In 1935 she shot to international stardom with the release of *The 39 Steps*. Hollywood beckoned and she appeared in a wide range of films including *The General Died at Dawn*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*. When her sister was killed in the Blitz she put her acting career on hold and served in France and Italy as a Red Cross Nurse. Her last film was *The Fan* (based on Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*) directed by Otto Preminger.

### Alma Reville

Alma Reville, wife of Alfred Hitchcock was a major influence on his work but she had a career of her own both before and after their marriage in 1926. She started as editor's assistant and continuity girl at the London film studios at St Margarets, Twickenham in the mid-1910s and was senior to her future husband when they met at the Famous Players-Lasky studio in Islington in the early 1920s. They were married after they returned from shooting *The Pleasure Garden* (on which she was assistant director) in Munich and worked on a great many of her husband's films. They were always together and famously spent their evenings discussing the day's filming and refining their work. Alma had a particular talent for continuity, editing and story structure and must have been of great assistance during the preparation and filmmaking process. Reville also worked on several films under her own name including scripting work for several major films, *The Constant Nymph* and *The First Born* and later on various British films such as *After the Verdict* (1929), Gracie Fields' first starring vehicle, *Sally in Our Alley* (1931), *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, 1935, *The Water Gipsies*, 1932.

A BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE RESTORATION

55th BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL ARCHIVE GALA

Live performance of Stephen Horne's new score featuring  
Stephen Horne, Janey Miller and Martin Pyne  
Thursday 20 October 7.30pm Queen Elizabeth Hall



# The FIRST BORN

a film by MILES MANDER

starring MADELEINE CARROLL and MILES MANDER  
with new score by STEPHEN HORNE

Gainsborough Pictures presents  
MILES MANDER and MADELEINE CARROLL in  
THE FIRST BORN  
Also starring JOHN LODER  
Produced by MICHAEL BALCON, MILES MANDER and C.M. WOOLF  
Directed by MILES MANDER  
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