



The Dancer's Dream (1905)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MR PAUL! BFI CELEBRATES BRITISH FILM PIONEER'S 150TH BIRTHDAY

**** BFI Southbank Celebration Event, 27 October ****

**** Free BFI Player Film Collection available from 28 October ****

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/collection/robert-paul>

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Press release: 22 October 2019

Multitalented British film pioneer **Robert (RW) Paul (1869-1943)** was born in London 150 years ago this month. A contemporary of the Lumière brothers, Robert Paul created the foundations for what we take for granted as cinema today. The most prolific British filmmaker of the early film period, he along with his wife, actress Ellen Daws, made over 700 films of which 80+ films are currently known to survive, although more are being discovered in archives around the world.

To mark this unique anniversary, BFI are hosting a **special birthday celebration at BFI Southbank on 27 October (15:20, NFT1)** and releasing a **free BFI Player collection, 'Robert Paul Giant of Early Film'**, including recently discovered titles, *Fun on the Clothes-line* (1896), *A Miner's Daily Life* (1904) and *The Fatal Hand* (1906) plus a host of newly available films including *The Dancer's Dream* (1905), *Extraordinary Cab Accident* (1903) as well as classics *Come Along Do!* (1898) and *The ? Motorist* (1906) and one of the earliest known films of London, *Blackfriars Bridge* (1896).

Exceptionally versatile, Robert Paul, led the way in so many different areas, as an engineer, inventor, exhibitor, producer and filmmaker. He established the first purpose-built film studio at Muswell Hill, London in 1898, created the illustrated film catalogue and invented projection equipment. Robert Paul pioneered almost every kind of film from documentary to fiction and fantasy, popular comedies, dramas, and elaborate trick films.

He produced some of the first films shot in Spain, Portugal, Egypt and Sweden and captured some of the most newsworthy events from the late Victorian era, such as frontline reportage from the Anglo-Boer War and the pomp and circumstance of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Procession. Robert Paul made significant innovations in film form, including the first two-scene film, *Come*

Along Do! (1898), which can now be viewed with its currently missing second shot, digitally restored from the film's illustrated catalogue entry.

Recently discovered and attributed to Robert Paul, *Fun on the Clothes-line* (1896), identified by BFI National Archive Curator Bryony Dixon during the BFI's recent Victorian Film project, features Paul himself, Ellen his wife and Harry Lamore, a slack wire artist. Swedish Film Archive researcher Camille Blot-Wellens identified *A Miner's Daily Life* (1904), the first mining film) and *The Fatal Hand* (1906), a macabre film of a madman on the loose.

Robert Paul's 150th anniversary is being marked with a number of related events:

- Ian Christie's eagerly anticipated book 'Robert Paul and the Origins of British Cinema' (Chicago University Press) will be published this November.
- A new exhibition on Paul, 'The Forgotten Showman', opens at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford on 17 November, running until February.
- Independent researcher and film historian Camille Blot-Wellens (who has been responsible for identifying a number of Robert Paul films in the Swedish Film Archive) will present the annual Ernest Lindgren Lecture 'A Centenary Tribute to Harold Brown' at BFI Southbank on 10 December, celebrating the life and contribution of Harold Brown, the BFI's first archive preservation officer, who pioneered a methodology to identify early films through their physical characteristics.

The lecture will explore the continuing relevance and cumulative knowledge of Brown's work. An expanded edition of Harold Brown's seminal 'Physical Characteristics of Early Films as Aids to Identification' (edited by Camille Blot-Wellens) will be published by FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives) on 10 December.

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ABOUT THE BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.

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 services. 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, Michael Powell and Emeric 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.