

ely
film
society

the
notes

april
2018

latest news

EFS has been going for six successful years, and several founding committee members have indicated they would like to step down. We need to fill their roles, which are crucial but not over-demanding on time. Would you be interested in volunteering? You also get to help choose the films! Ask a committee member for more details at a showing or ring 01353 668639 or 656959

The Long Good Friday

John Mackenzie, UK 1980

Script by Barrie Keeffe
Produced by Barry Hanson
Music by Francis Monkman
Cinematography by Phil Meheux

Paul Freeman Colin
Leo Dolan Phil
Kevin McNally Irish Youth
Patti Love Carol
P.H. Moriarty Razors
Derek Thompson Jeff
Bryan Marshall Harris
Bob Hoskins Harold
Helen Mirren Victoria
Ruby Head Harold's Mother
Charles Cork Eric
Olivier Pierre Chef
Pierce Brosnan 1st Irishman
Daragh O'Malley 2nd Irishman
Dave King Parky
Karl Howman David
Eddie Constantine Charlie
Stephen Davies Tony
Brian Hayes Pool Attendant



It all looks so long ago. We have a settled, kitsch view of the 1970s and parts of *The Long Good Friday* look like a documentary. Bad news is relayed through Trimphones; in the opening sequence a coffin is unloaded from a train at Paddington (when did that last happen?); Concorde taxis impressively at Heathrow; grim-faced men in dubiously-cut suits emerge from Ford Granadas; above all the silent star of the film is the wasteland of London's

near-abandoned docks. Yet its themes are modern and timeless: ruthless ambition, the power of money, the bloody-mindedness of those with a political mission, and the way in which personal flaws drive events, which in turn force those flaws to the surface.

The British film industry was in barely better shape than the docks. Major productions invariably needed American money which brought American terms and the expectation

of a mid-Atlantic product. To produce something that appealed strongly to a home audience was to be "provincial" and condemned to small budgets. Yet directors rose to the challenges of penury. One was John Mackenzie, a Scot who got his start in the industry as assistant to Ken Loach (doyen of the awkward squad) on *Cathy Come Home* and *Up The Junction* before striking out on his own with several productions for the influential BBC1 *Play For Today* drama strand.

Elsewhere, playwright Barrie Keeffe [*Barbarians; Sus; Gimme Shelter*] was observing the changes overtaking London. A new mood was in the air, and though she is never mentioned, the ascent of Margaret Thatcher and a new rough buoyancy underpins TLGF's events.

Harold Shand (Bob Hoskins) has no doubt that London is now on the up. London's top gangster, he fronts "the hardest operation since Hitler stuck a swastika on his jockstrap", as he boasts to his coterie of fixers, bent coppers and would-be property tycoons on

the deck of his yacht as it passes under Tower Bridge. ("We're not an island any more, we're a leading European state", he continues. Oh the irony, nearly forty years on). Convinced that London will host the 1988 Olympics, he wants to cement his wealth by control of the derelict docklands, laundered by the expedient of being too big for politicians to argue with.

But other agendas are already unfolding. Keeffe's script and Mackenzie's images are bold and confident enough to let the explanation of the opening dumbshow involving a suitcase of money, and the mystery of the coffin, take an hour to even partially be revealed. By the time Harold screams "all this anarchy is over *five poxy grand?!'*" to his betraying lieutenant, it is too late. He has tangled with the IRA, who will not be tangled with at any price. Shovelling money increasingly desperately at the problem cannot save Harold from a dose of his own medicine. At the end a young and skinny Pierce Brosnan need

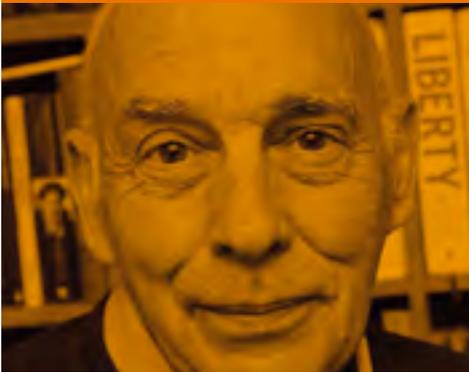
say nothing; a silenced pistol holds all the remaining answers.

The Long Good Friday is also a pure revengers' tragedy of the sort an earlier century would have recognised. There are strong streaks of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* (Victoria shrieking about "bloody havoc" is surely no accident, while the lieutenant Jeff fancies he can claim both throne and queen through his intrigue), but the relentless savagery recalls *The White Devil* and Harold's hubris is pure *Tamburlaine*. (Add *Edward II* for the gay treachery, boldly done for the time: had Christopher Marlowe not disappeared in strange circumstances in 1594, he'd have had Keeffe's script credit).

Bob Hoskins was an actor of limited range but great depth, and Harold Shand was possibly the defining role of his film career. In an interview Hoskins said of it: "Funnily enough I've never had any trouble with violence. It frightens the life out of me that it comes so easily." Luckily Jessica Rabbit never had to find out.

BARRIE KEEFFE

born East London, 31 October 1945



perhaps face-to-face is the wrong way to put it. I remember being terrified when I realised he was pissing in the urinal next to me. He was friendly - I was scared. We know so much more about him now. I wanted to ask him a million questions. I thought he looked haunted, so I didn't.

[...] I put the words on paper. Barry [Hanson] the producer, sees the whole thing - the music, the actors, the director. John Mackenzie had to be the director and, as a novice at this film-making lark, I learned so much from him. I talk in dialogue at meetings, John talks in images - he can run the unwritten film through his head - you can see it.

[...] Barry, John and I had our screaming matches but we were working fast and the budget was small. TLGF only cost £800,000. It was, then, backed by Lew Grade. The other film he was working on was the multi-million Raise The Titanic. For what it cost, we thought a more profitable option would have been to drain the Atlantic Ocean.

[...] Lord Grade was appalled

because he thought it was (i) IRA propaganda and (ii) he couldn't show it in his cinemas because the IRA would blow them up. Through the haze of his cigar smoke it was impossible to challenge the logic of that.. The film was going to be chopped up, so it was an hour in length and suitable for television, with no reference to the IRA or the violence because 'it might be a bad influence on young people'. Barry stole the film from the cutting room and drove it up to the Edinburgh Film Festival where it was shown and acclaimed. It went on general release and (according to the Sunday Mirror) was the first film in London where ticket touts outside sold bootleg videos of it as well as tickets.

from the 1998 Methuen introduction to the screenplay

“ So what kind of film would I like to see?”, I asked myself. My favourites have always been gangster films - mostly American, sometimes French. I wondered about why there had been so few English gangster films (this was 1979) to grip me. I was born and brought up in the East End of London. I thought about Ronnie and Reggie Kray - folk heroes, legends in my part of town. As a kid I once came face-to-face with Ronnie in a lavatory at their local pub in Bethnal Green - but

NEXT MONTH'S FILM IS
CHUNGKING EXPRESS
(Wong Kar-Wei, Hong Kong 1995)

Monday 21 May

www.elyfilmsociety.com

www.meetup.com/ely-film/

