BOB HOSKINS HELEN MIRREN

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

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IN MEMORIAM

by Michael Brooke

This special edition of *The Long Good Friday* and *Mona Lisa* wasn't originally intended as a memorial to Bob Hoskins, but the sad news of his death on 29 April 2014, at a very early stage of the project's development, made this unavoidable. Fortunately, it's hard to think of a more fitting tribute than releasing major new restorations of what are widely acknowledged to be his two greatest big-screen performances.

When Hoskins first stepped in front of the cameras in the summer of 1979 to play *The Long Good Friday*'s ambitious East End gangster, he was by no means unknown: he'd spent several years honing his craft as a character actor on stage and television and in small film roles, and had played the lead in Dennis Potter's groundbreaking six-part television masterpiece *Pennies from Heaven* (1978). But his performance as Harold Shand drew deserved comparisons with James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson even at the time (see our selection of contemporary reviews on page 40 of this book), and catapulted him to international stardom—helped by an unexpected flair for American accents.

Unlike the situation with *The Long Good Friday*, Hoskins wasn't the first choice for *Mona Lisa*, but as soon as he was cast as George the chauffeur it became impossible to imagine anyone else in the role. Whereas Harold Shand was florid and Shakespearean (indeed, *The Long Good Friday*'s producer Barry Hanson cast him after seeing his bull-in-a-china-shop take on Richard III), George is resigned to the fact that he's one of life's also-rans—emphasised by the fact that he's just emerged from a seven-year prison sentence at the start of the film and is trying to adjust to a world that's already changed. His immensely complex, subtle and moving performance hoovered up almost every Best Actor award going—Cannes, BAFTA, a Golden Globe and many others—and only just missed out on what would have been a richly deserved Oscar, thanks to strong competition from seven-time nominee Paul Newman.

But if Hoskins never won an Oscar, he won something far more precious: universal recognition as an authentic British national treasure, a status that he achieved early and maintained until his death. There are only a handful of major international stars—Tom Hanks, Keanu Reeves and indeed Paul Newman spring to mind—about whom nobody ever seemed to have a bad word. Hoskins was undoubtedly in their company: legendarily generous with his time, hugely supportive of much less experienced colleagues (whether co-stars like Cathy Tyson or filmmakers like Shane Meadows), and despite his often fearsome demeanour on screen he was the exact opposite in real life. You'll hear many

stories about him in this book and on the accompanying discs, but what most leaps out is the ferocious passion that Hoskins had for his work, and the equally genuine love felt towards him by everyone who knew him.

In 2014, Helen Mirren wrote an eulogy to him in the *Guardian*, which included this affectionate reminiscence of the third and final time they worked together, on the film *Last Orders* (2001):

> He had become a very successful Hollywood actor. More importantly for him, he was now a happy man with a great marriage. Bob always had things in the right order. All his natural humanity and generosity had found its way to the surface. We spent hours together on a bench opposite the Houses of Parliament, shooting a long scene, and, as we chatted and laughed and gossiped about our times together, I could not have been happier than to be able to spend that time in an iconic London place, with an iconic Londoner.

Rest in peace, Bob.

BOB HOSKINS
26 October 1942 - 29 April 2014

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

CAST

BOB HOSKINS as Harold Shand
HELEN MIRREN as Victoria
DAVE KING as Parky
BRYAN MARSHALL as Harris
DEREK THOMPSON as Jeff
EDDIE CONSTANTINE as Charlie
PAUL FREEMAN as Colin
LEO DOLAN as Phil
KEVIN McNALLY as Irish Youth
PATTI LOVE as Carol Benson
P.H. MORIARTY as Razors
RUBY HEAD as Harold's Mother
CHARLES CORK as Eric
OLIVIER PIERRE as Chef
PIERCE BROSNAN as 1st Irishman
DARAGH O'MALLEY as 2nd Irishman
KARL HOWMAN as David
BRIAN HALL as Alan
ALAN FORD as Jack
DAVE OULD as Don
PAUL KEMBER as Ginger
BILL MOODY as Boston
ALAN DEVLIN as Priest
STEPHEN DAVIES as Tony
BRUCE ALEXANDER as Mac
NIGEL HUMPHREYS as Dave
BRIAN HAYES as Pool Attendant
GEORGIE PHILLIPS as Eugene

MARY SHEEN as Lil
PAULINE MELVILLE as Dora
TREVOR LAIRD as Boy Under Car
PAUL BARBER as Erroll
DEXTER FLETCHER as Kid
BILL CORNELIUS as Pete
RYAN MICHAEL as Waiter Ricardo
ROBERT WALKER as Jimmy
NICK STRINGER as Billy
GILLIAN TAYLFORTH as Sherry
ROBERT HAMILTON as Flynn
JAMES OTTAWAY as Commissionaire
ROY ALON as Captain Death
TONY ROHR as O'Flaherty

CREW

Directed by **JOHN MACKENZIE**
Produced by **BARRY HANSON**
Executive Producers **GEORGE HARRISON**
and **DENIS O'BRIEN** (uncredited)
Screenplay by **BARRIE KEEFFE**
Cinematography by **PHIL MÉHEUX**
Film Editing by **MIKE TAYLOR**
Art Direction by **VIC SYMONDS**
Costume Design by **TUDOR GEORGE**
Music by **FRANCIS MONKMAN**
Black Lion Films/HandMade Films, 1980


ck car
acing
AMPIONSHIP
28. 1979
UPERCARS
STARS
SIX RACES
70 CHILDREN £1

THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

by Mark Duguid

"I dread to think what the future will be," sang The Specials in the summer of 1979, "when we're living in gangster times". With elliptical lyrics that seemed to identify parallels between organised crime and a powerful and increasingly oppressive state, 'Gangsters' tapped into a generalised anxiety about Britain's future against the backdrop of the Conservative landslide in that May's general election and the hard rightward turn it signalled.

Coincidentally, a feature film being shot that same summer was also employing a gangster trope to say something about changing Britain. *The Long Good Friday* wouldn't be the only film to size up Thatcher's Britain. But in the summer of 1979, when even Margaret Thatcher didn't yet know what Thatcherism was, it seemed to have a startlingly clear view of the shape of the coming revolution. And the nearly two years it took to reach cinemas, the film seemed to have become not less but more prescient.

During the 1980s, Thatcher's government fundamentally reshaped Britain—not just politically, socially and economically, but physically. Factories, forges, mills and workshops across the once-great industrial cities were left empty and derelict in the wake of rapid and destructive deindustrialisation. What had been Britain's proudest industry of all, coal mining, was effectively all but discontinued. Money drained out of Scotland, the North and the Midlands, but it flooded London, and especially the City. Around the east and south, and especially along the river, London was rebuilt from the ground. Under the eye of the London Docklands Development Corporation (set up in 1981), the land along the eastern Thames once occupied by teeming docklands threw up proud steel and glass towers fit for financial titans.

The Specials may have been right to dread the future, but it would be kind to *The Long Good Friday*. Thirty-five years after it fought its way into cinemas, the film has lost none of its currency. It is acknowledged as a defining film of its era, has become a fixture in polls of great British films, and was long since admitted to the inner cadre of Brit gangster films, seriously rivalled only by *Brighton Rock* (1947), *Performance* (1970), *Get Carter* (1971) and (perhaps) *Sexy Beast* (2000). Like all of those films, *The Long Good Friday* described its times. But unlike them, it seems to have gone further: it predicted the future, with unnerving precision.

A fictional character, imagined into existence more than two years before the London

Docklands Development Corporation, *The Long Good Friday*'s Harold Shand is nevertheless an eloquent herald of a brave new world. "I'm not a politician," he tells the charmed audience he has assembled on his yacht, "I'm a businessman, with a sense of history. But I'm also a Londoner." The vision he goes on to outline is one worthy of both a politician and a businessman, but it's not one with much use for history: "Having cleared away the outdated, we've got mile after mile and acre after acre of land for our future prosperity. No other city in the world has got right in its centre such an opportunity for profitable progress." Profitable progress for some there certainly was. Harold's only mistake, as it turned out, was to imagine that he might take a share in the spoils.

In Bob Hoskins' magnificent performance, Harold becomes a tragic antihero to match Jimmy Cagney's Tom Powers in *The Public Enemy* (1931), or Edward G Robinson's Rico in *Little Caesar* (1931)—a physical match too: a stocky 5'6", Hoskins was roughly halfway between Cagney and Robinson in height and build. But his immediate antecedents are not from cinema, but from television. In the 1970s and into the 80s, underworld antiheroes were plentiful on the small screen in series and serials like *Gangsters* (1976-78), *Out*, *Fox* (both 1978), *Widows* (1983-85) and *Minder* (1979-94). It was TV, too, that dared, in the wake of recent Met police corruption scandals, to suggest a degree of moral equivalence between villain and cop, as it did in the likes of *The Sweeney* (1975-78) and G.F Newman's *Law and Order* (1978).

For all its classic gangster genre parallels, one of the delights of *The Long Good Friday* is the way it turns on its head Hollywood deference towards the *Cosa Nostra*. Setting up an early opposition between "the boy from Stepney" and "the kid from New Jersey", the film takes a perverse pleasure in showing the Americans' flight from a spot of homegrown terrorism. Eddie Constantine's Charlie and his associate (and lover?) Tony are effete, fastidious, superstitious ("it's bad luck to put a hat on the bed"), moderate drinkers ("I hate drunks") and early to bed. Most delicious of all is Charlie's lofty parting shot at Harold: "We do not deal with gangsters, period." (Which invites Harold's gloriously contemptuous retort, "The Mafia? Ha! I've shit 'em!")

But what really distances the film from homage is its powerfully authentic evocation of the East End underworld. As a boy in south east London and then a local journalist, screenwriter Barrie Keeffe had a ringside seat on the Kray era. Several scenes in his script drew on tales he came across in his reporter days, notably the scene in which a loose-tongued villain is found crucified on the floor of an empty warehouse, which, he said, "happened to someone I knew". And in the dog days of their empire, Ronnie and Reggie made a vain attempt to do their own deal with the Mafia, which collapsed embarrassingly when their would-be partners were refused a visa to enter Britain. In Keeffe's script, Harold is particular about arranging visas for his own Mafia guests.

Though the Krays don't get a namecheck in *The Long Good Friday*'s world, Harold Shand is apparently the beneficiary of their disappearance. He is the *capo dei capi* of London mobsters, who boasts of the "10 years of peace" he has brought to gangland—roughly matching the lull following end of the Krays' long feud with the Richardson gang and the brothers' own 1969 conviction.

Harold himself is both of and apart from the Krays' world. He shares the brothers' taste for luxury and their delusions of grandeur, and fondly remembers his East End boyhood. And like any good East End boy he looks after his mum (or tries to). But he has an eye on the future, and a yearning for respectability. His dockland dream marks his bid for the legitimacy for his 'corporation'—even if it takes a corrupt councillor or a bent copper or two to get him there. And for a gangster, Harold has an oddly puritanical streak: he turns his nose up at drugs ("Filth. Is there no decency in this disgusting world?"), and has an apparently sincere if hypocritical outrage at violence, at least when it's directed at him and those close to him. Nor does he go in for archetypal gangland promiscuity, let alone Ronnie Kray's homosexuality; he is in a monogamous, loving and surprisingly egalitarian relationship.

We can thank Helen Mirren for making Harold and Victoria (two prime ministers and a monarch!) one of British cinema's most appealing crime couples. She lobbied Keeffe and director John Mackenzie to expand her part, taking the character a long way from the conventional gangster's moll. Though it's not clear whether Victoria is quite as posh as she appears, her relationship with Harold has the air of authenticity: its model is surely the 12-year partnership between West London gangster John Bindon and the actress, model and socialite Vicki Hodge, while Victoria's talk of playing lacrosse with Princess Anne calls to mind the illicit 'friendship' Bindon enjoyed with Anne's aunt, Princess Margaret. A sometime actor (his films include *Poor Cow* and *Performance*), Bindon had many showbiz friends—including Bob Hoskins, whose testimony helped to acquit him in his 1979 murder trial.

Hoskins wasn't the only one of the cast and crew with a toehold on real-life gangland. Keeffe still had contacts from his journalist days, and Helen Mirren could boast "a genuine BK [before Krays] East End gangster for an uncle." Understandably, a number of underworld types took an interest in the film, and Mackenzie even put a few of them to use in the cast, as members of Harold's outfit.

With a similar concern for authenticity, Mackenzie was determined to avoid the routine filmic clichés of London—red buses, black taxis. Lingering shots of London landmarks are kept at bay—bar the one magnificent indulgence: the receding image of Tower Bridge which serves as backdrop to Harold's "hands across the ocean" speech. What we get instead is a multiplicity of Londons seldom served up by cinema.

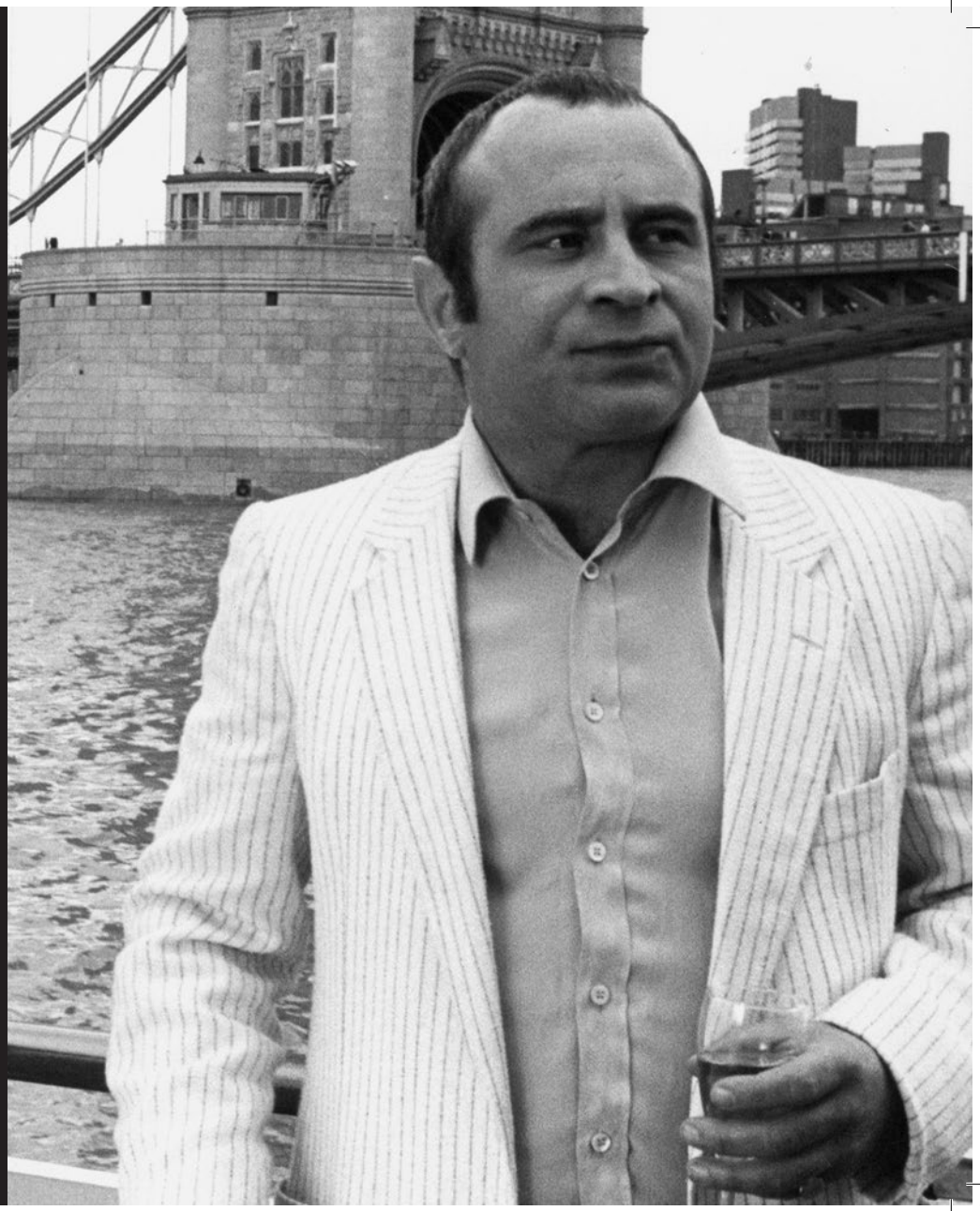
It's quite a tour, incorporating Paddington Station, Heathrow Airport, the river and its docklands (especially St Katharine's Docks), church, swimming pool, pubs, restaurants, casino, Brixton squat, abattoir, cemetery, City Hall, banger racetrack, the Savoy Hotel. It's with Harold, of course, that we visit most of these. But though he might proudly see himself as "a Londoner", and thinks of London as his 'manor', he seems oddly out of place in it. Even his visits to his own businesses are almost invariably out of hours. His one scheduled social outing, to his own personal relic of the old East End, the Lion and Unicorn pub, is cruelly cut short by the IRA's bomb.

Harold's unease is most obvious on his trip south to the grimy Brixton squat where Paul Barber's hapless grass Erroll the Ponce receives an unwanted etiquette lesson from Harold's softly-spoken enforcer, Razors. Notwithstanding Erroll's junkie squalor, it's here that, for almost the only time in the film, we see a semblance of genuine community, of real people leading real lives. But it's this that causes Harold to eulogise his own lost London ("Used to be a nice street, this. Decent families, no scum."), even as he smiles indulgently on the petty extortion of Dexter Fletcher's street urchin.

The film maps a capital cut not just by class but by time. 'Old' London is represented by the social spaces that are the last strongholds of the old East End working class—church, pub, sports stadium, swimming pool —and the now-abandoned workplaces—dockland warehouse, abattoir—that once sustained them. Then there's the playground for the wealthy that is 'new' London: casino, mirror-floored restaurant, Savoy, Harold and Victoria's luxury penthouse apartment and the defining emblem of Harold's self-image, his yacht: all vulgar new-rich swagger, with polished walnut and brass interior and 'HS' motif rug. And finally, there is the film's real subject, the London yet to come, the London of Harold's imagining—destined never to be anything more than a scale model.

Looking back on the film with Iain Sinclair in 2014, Keeffe lamented the lack of ambition in that model. "It underestimates it totally. It should have been like Manhattan but nobody would have believed it." But there's a kinder reading. Harold's plans are indeed laughably modest compared to what actually transpired. But then Harold consistently fails to see the bigger picture. He is a man between two worlds—too smart not to see that the old underworld has had its day, but not quite smart or agile enough to build and own the future he has glimpsed.

The Long Good Friday is rightly seen as one of the defining accounts of the Thatcher era. Which, for a film in production as the Iron Lady came to power, would be prophetic enough. But 35 years later, it's a film that just keeps on giving. It's not just that, as Iain Sinclair has noted, it foretold that the London Olympics would be seized by money and politics as another opportunity for 'profitable progress' at the expense of the residents of the city's



East End (no matter that the games actually arrived in 2012, not 1988 as predicted). In an age of end-to-end banking scandals, when the behaviour of bankers and gangsters is so indistinguishable that the two words have fused into one, it's arguably only now that we can see just how extraordinary the film is as futurology.

Now that even the IRA has 'gone legitimate' and London is reshaping itself again thanks to foreign-backed 'investment projects' from Gherkin to Shard to Walkie Talkie, a modern-day Harold might find himself in a land of almost unimaginable potential (so long as he could reign in his more UKIP-ish tendencies). And we can only wonder whether London's elected mayor, loyal friend of oligarchs and tireless defender of big capital, whose existing partners include a Hong Kong-based property developer with a history of illegally bulldozing homes, might well find Harold Shand a man he could do business with.

Real gangster times indeed.

Mark Duguid is a senior curator in the BFI National Archive, with overall responsibility for the online representation of archival film and television. He programmed the BFI Southbank season **Second Coming: The rebirth of UK TV drama** ***in 2010, and was lead programmer of the 2012 season*** **Ealing: Light and Dark.** ***He is the author of the BFI TV Classics monograph*** **Cracker** ***(Palgrave/BFI, 2009), co-editor of*** **Ealing Revisited** ***(Palgrave/BFI, 2012), and a contributor to*** **Sight & Sound** ***magazine and the*** **International Encyclopedia** ***of Television.***

MAKING THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

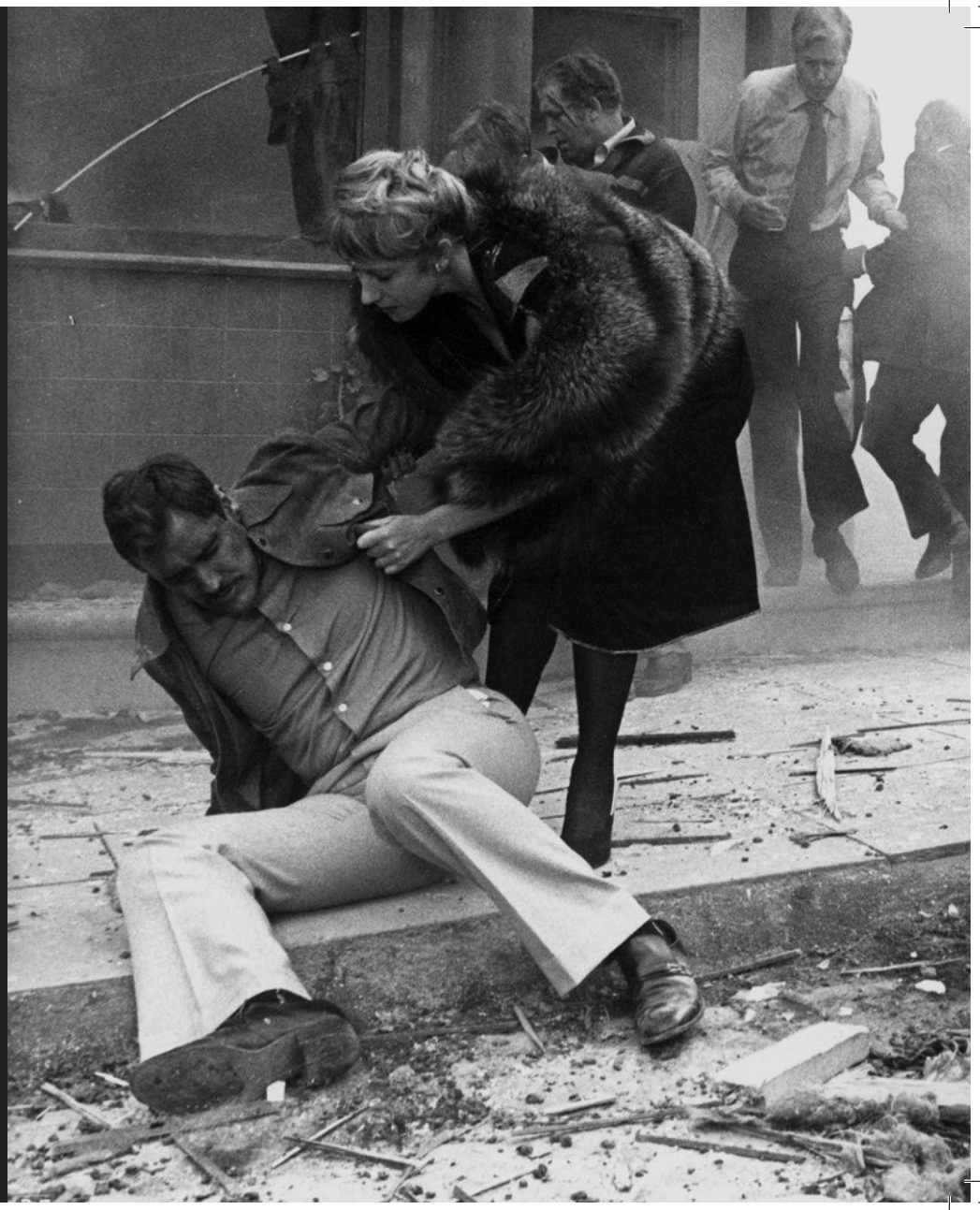
by Robert Sellers

The exhaustive, eye-opening and sometimes jaw-dropping history of HandMade Films, *Very Naughty Boys* (Titan Books, 2013), includes detailed production histories of all the films associated with the company, from *Life of Brian* (1979) to *Nuns on the Run* (1990) - even if, like *The Long Good Friday*, they had already been completed before HandMade became involved. We are very grateful to Robert Sellers and Titan Books for permission to include the sections on *The Long Good Friday* and *Mona Lisa* in this book.

It was Eric Idle who emerged as saviour. In November 1980, he was asked by Helen Mirren to attend a London film festival showing of a violent mobster picture she'd made with Bob Hoskins that was facing traumatic difficulties; nobody wanted to release it. It was called *The Long Good Friday*. Idle said, "I loved the movie and I thought, 'This is a hit.' So I phoned up [HandMade Films' co-founder] Denis O'Brien and I said, 'Denis, put your money down here, you'll have a hit film, my boy.' And he did and, as a mark of his gratitude, he sent me absolutely nothing, and I think flat forgot about it. So I never got any credit for *The Long Good Friday*, but the producer and director wrote me a nice letter saying thank you very much and Bob was always very thankful. But it was a fantastic film. I was happy to help out."

Made back in the summer of 1979 and financed by showbiz kingpin Lew Grade, the problems started after the film was in the can and director John Mackenzie had taken a five-day break in the sun to wind down and recharge after a strenuous shoot. "When I got back," explained Mackenzie, "our producer, Barry Hanson, said there had been a little bit of trouble over the film. Grade's company owned it and didn't want to put it out as a film at all; they wanted it cut down to 80 minutes and sold to television. I said, 'Well, that's ridiculous, what absolute nonsense, we just can't let them do that.' And he said, 'Well, you know they're my bosses.' I said, 'Barry, it's not going to happen.' He said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, they've done it.' I nearly hit him in the middle of Wardour Street." The battle for *The Long Good Friday* had begun.

Everyone who'd worked on the film felt betrayed by the actions of suited money men who displayed no faith in what they'd achieved, preferring to recoup the budget with a swift sale to television. A cinema release would have entailed costly ad campaigns, paying for prints and so on, and was a gamble no one at Grade's organisation was prepared to take. Barry Hanson added, "They also wanted to make it marketable for American TV. They



pulled in this old white-haired editor who afterwards looked as though he'd had a heart seizure by watching it. He was brought in to actually carve the thing to shreds. They were determined not to release it as a film, quite the contrary, they were going to kill it."

Mackenzie was in no doubt that the film's subplot concerning Irish terrorists had Grade's people running scared. "You can't let the IRA win," he was told, to which the film-maker replied, "You want a gangster to win?" He went on to explain, "Lew Grade thought it was an IRA publicity film and unpatriotic. He was a bit frightened that a few bombs would go off in his cinemas and it's very difficult to argue with that sort of paranoia. Actually, the IRA liked it so why should they bomb us? But our film wasn't pro-IRA, no way, because I hate the idea of bombing. I don't hate the IRA, but I hate the things they did, bombing innocent people, I just do not condone that at all."

The real breakthrough came when *Friday* was screened as part of a Mackenzie retrospective at the 1980 Edinburgh Film Festival. Critics were bowled over and poured public scorn over the decision not to give it a deserved theatrical run. In a wasteland of home-grown movies, critics saw Friday as affirmation that there was still talent and vitality left in British commercial film-making.

Encouraged by the reaction, Barry Hanson stole the film from the cutting room and started parading it around the industry, even flying with it to the States. "I went to Paramount and showed it to Jeff Katzenberg and, I think, Don Simpson. They liked it but didn't want to pick it up for domestic America. I showed it to a few other people in LA then brought the thing back. Pressure was mounting, everybody was saying they ought to put it out as a film because, by this time, I'd made sure as many people as possible had seen it."

And yet the executives at Grade Central (or "that shower of bastards", as Mackenzie referred to them) remained intractable. There was nothing left now but for everyone involved from Hanson, Mackenzie and writer Barrie Keeffe, to Hoskins and Mirren—to make public pleas for finance to buy their own film back from Grade. It was a race against time; ITV were already scheduling it for a prime-time slot early in the new year. The asking price was £1 million. Hanson took a full-page ad out in *Screen International*, the UK's equivalent of *Variety*, packed with glowing notices (notable amongst them David Puttnam's belief that *Friday* was "the outstanding post-war British gangster movie") plus his office phone number begging prospective buyers to get in touch. Both Rank and EMI toyed briefly with the idea of taking it on but ultimately passed. After that, nothing.

The mood was dark in the *Friday* camp. Convinced that Grade had finally managed to smother their film, some began contemplating the most extreme measures. Barrie Keeffe recalled, "Just before Christmas, we were all sitting in our office in Carnaby Street. It was

getting dark and there was a Salvation Army band outside playing carols. The film looked dead in the water; I never thought the bloody thing was ever going to see the light of day. And there was Bob Hoskins with a bottle of vodka and two poodles on his lap he'd bought as Christmas presents for someone. He said, 'Wait a minute. There's four of us here... I know a geezer who, for £10,000, that's only £2,500 each, he'd wipe him out.' It was one of those mad moments, you think, my God, I can pick up the *Daily Mirror* tomorrow and see Lord Grade's been wiped out. And Barry Hanson said, 'Hang on, Bob, you know it's a big family, another one would pop up.' He said, 'All right then, five grand each.' There was a lot of silliness 'cos of exhaustion. That was at the absolute lowest of the low."

Worse was to come when it was decreed that Hoskins's voice would be indecipherable to American ears so was completely re-dubbed by another actor. "The whole thing was unbelievable," fumed Mackenzie. "You know, the business is full of tasteless idiots. Bob was totally incensed, it's the worst thing you can do to an actor. So the fight was on.' Hoskins decided to sue. As the trial date approached, an impressive array of famous names, Alec Guinness among them, agreed to testify that what Grade's people were doing was tantamount to a prostitution of Hoskins' acting ability. Sensing things were getting out of hand, Mackenzie set up a face-to-face meeting with Grade's right-hand man, Jack Gill. "I remember it was the day before Christmas," Mackenzie recalled. "It was snowing. I went to his office and said, 'This is going to look bad for you, it's rotten for us, and the film's going to suffer.' But he was adamant the case was going ahead. I said, 'Well, here's who's going to be the witnesses against you.' And I read the list and he went pale, he went white. I said, 'That will look extremely bad... you'll be castigated. Now the simple answer is, we have someone who will buy the film and then everyone will be off the hook.' And that did it, we got the film back."

Still babies in the industry, HandMade displayed more understanding of what constituted a hit movie than the dinosaurs over at Grade Central. Mackenzie's perspective was that "the Pythons liked it and Denis O'Brien saw that he could make a killing with it. George Harrison hated it, but Denis was running the thing. George was sort of a backseater, he didn't really know what they'd bought; it was only later when George saw it he was quite upset, he thought it was too violent, but by that time it was a big success so he just accepted it."

HandMade's offer of £700,000 to buy the film was funded, ironically, from the profits of *Life of Brian*, the film Lord Grade's brother Lord Delfont so famously turned his back on. Together, these two siblings really were the Cannon and Ball of the British film industry. They represented the old guard, HandMade the new.

Barry Hanson claimed the whole debacle over *The Long Good Friday* was the fault not of Lord Grade but his lieutenant Jack Gill. "Grade was wrongly painted as the villain," Hanson

asserts. “It was Jack Gill, he hated it. When we were negotiating to buy back the film, we had a joke with the lawyers. Gill always put his name on his television programmes, ‘Jack Gill Presents’, and the lawyers said, ‘I think in your case it’s Jack Gill resents to present.’ But I suppose Lew did have ultimate responsibility in what was going on with it. But all this was going on in the face of his bloody company collapsing, when he was making bloated blockbusters like *Raise the Titanic*. Lew never saw our film until right at the end because they kept it from him and, of course, he liked it, thought it was a very well-made film, but by then the die had been cast as to what would become of it. I think it was a pity that Lew didn’t see it earlier and didn’t have any opportunity to get behind it.”

During the HandMade negotiations, Hanson had no contact whatsoever with Harrison; his dealings were principally with O’Brien. “Denis was a bit bizarre, I suppose,” Hanson added, “but he was straight with us, he honoured the deal I had with the Grade people and we were grateful for what he did. I haven’t had a cost statement from him for 20 years, which we should have done. Not a word about what it did and what happened to it. And we didn’t have a video deal. It was the beginning of the video boom and I remember going back to him and saying he ought to honour that as being non-theatric, but he wouldn’t have it. And I do know they sold it to EMI for quite a lot of money.” HandMade also left the *Friday* team in the dark in terms of how things were performing in the overseas market. Hanson for one even had to pay for the air fare to attend the New York opening of his own movie!

Like so many British gangster movies, the influences of *The Long Good Friday* are traceable back to the Kray twins. Writer Barrie Keeffe, born and bred in London’s East End, remembered as a 17-year-old pissing in the smelly urinal of the Krays’ local pub in Bethnal Green when Ronnie walked in. “He turned and said to me, ‘What do you think of this?’ Knowing he was gay, my heart was sinking. What am I supposed to look at? I thought he meant his cock. I was terrified. What it was was a gun, and he was saying stuff like, ‘It’s got a good feel, ain’t it?’” It was the start of Keeffe’s lifelong fascination with gangsters.

The Easter weekend of 1977—Barrie Keeffe is at home, bored. The phone rings. On the other end is Barry Hanson, a producer with Thames Television, wondering how Keeffe is getting on with the television thriller he’d asked him to write. Not very well, as it turns out. It was during dinner some months earlier that both men had come up with the notion of making a London gangland TV film. Keeffe says, “Barry commissioned it there and then. It was gonna be called *The Last Gangster Show*. There was no story or anything, it was just like, let’s do a British gangster movie, because there weren’t many around at the time.”

Keeffe drove around the East End and the Isle of Dogs looking for inspiration and found it in the shape of the new Docklands. Keeffe hated what he saw, a once-proud area stripped of its vibrancy by yuppie developers, and out of that anger grew the first seeds of his

story. What if some entrepreneurial villain tried to muscle in on Canary Wharf? The central character of Harold Shand began taking shape.

That evening, Keeffe met up with a friend for a drink. “We ended up in a totally Irish pub somewhere in North London. The band on stage played rebel songs and, at one point, got a Union Jack and set fire to it. When the collection bucket came round my mate was wise to this and whispered, ‘Don’t say anything, keep your voice down,’ ’cos I had a Cockney accent.”

Keeffe couldn’t help thinking this was like the good old/bad old days of the Krays; it was pure villainy, nothing short of a protection racket. A major strand of the film’s plot, terrorism versus gangsterism, had presented itself. Keeffe called Hanson with his idea. “Write it!” the producer bellowed down the line. “Just get at that typewriter and fucking write it.” Keeffe knuckled down and pounded out a first draft in four days. He called it *The Paddy Factor*, Scotland Yard lingo for crimes that can’t be explained so are put down to the IRA.

Despite its shortcomings, soon to be exposed, what this initial script had going for it was an exceptional central character, Harold Shand. Born out of Keeffe’s desire to write a part for James Cagney “if he’d been a Cockney”, Shand is a gangster extraordinaire, a sort of Cockney Corleone who charms a visiting Mafia big-shot while at the same time protecting his patch from marauding IRA mobsters. The general consensus was that there was only one man capable of bringing Shand to glorious life, a relatively unknown actor who’d recently scored big on TV in Denis Potter’s *Pennies from Heaven*—Bob Hoskins.

Hoskins was tracked down to the London Hospital for Tropical Diseases where a 27ft-long tapeworm was preparing to emerge from his backside. Mackenzie said, “Bob now says it was 35ft or something... it gets longer every time I hear that story. He’d just done *Zulu Dawn*, a terrible film, I’m told, but he was very committed to it, and he was very committed to Africa. Bob gets very intense about causes and he commits himself to them, but only for a time, but he does so wholeheartedly, which is lovely and it’s very refreshing and you go along with it. So he went out there to South Africa and he decided he wanted to live like the natives. ‘I’m not living in a fucking hotel,’ he said. So he lived in a hut. They gave him a hut and a telephone, and that’s how he got the tapeworm.”

The procedure was a delicate one; the worm had to be removed foot by foot and a nurse warned the visitors not to over-excite her patient as the worm might snap, leaving poor Bob to endure the whole ‘birth’ again. Keeffe added, “But telling Bob not to get excited is like telling Ian Paisley in full flight not to mention the Troubles.” Sure enough, as Hoskins listened to the pitch it was difficult to restrain him, having instantly connected with Harold Shand. “The gang could call him ‘H’,” he declared, before suggesting the film be called *H.*

Leaping out of bed, creative juices flowing, Hoskins demonstrated how the poster should look, a dominant H, like a crucifix, with Shand nailed to it.

Thanking Bob for his thought-provoking suggestions, Keeffe and Hanson left. However implausible the crucifix idea, it reminded Keeffe of one gruesome story from his days as a journalist. He recalled, "I had to go and see someone in hospital that had been found crucified to a warehouse floor. That was the punishment if you overstepped in someone else's territory. I asked him, the holes in his palms quite visible, how it happened and he said, 'Listen, son, put it down as a do-it-yourself accident. And I'd keep your fucking mouth shut.'" A not dissimilar incident eventually found its way into the film.

Like Keeffe, Hoskins had been brought up in a tough London neighbourhood, Finsbury Park, and knew his fair share of dodgy characters. Anxious to base Shand on authentic heavies and not be a crude caricature, Hoskins casually hung out with some of these bygone rogues. Most were flattered that an actor wanted to be like them. "Well, look at this little feller here, wants to be a gangster!" they'd playfully jibe. There was even employment to be had for a lucky few on the film as extras or technical advisers. Mackenzie observed, "They were quite an interesting lot. Barrie Keeffe also knew quite a few, actually, because he'd been a journalist in the East End and had an 'in' to that world. They were only on set for certain scenes. The big one is where the gang all get tooled up with guns and Bob tells them as they go off, 'Be discreet.' Well, those were all crooks and criminals who knew what the hell they were doing."

This 'underworld' presence ensured the film contained what Keeffe called "the smell of authenticity". Certainly, the crew made full use of the free advice on offer, as well as Mackenzie. "They'd say, 'John, not that I've ever done it, but if you're gonna stab someone you wouldn't do it like that.'"

During one scene, Hoskins was in full flight, arms flaying about and mouth on overdrive. One of the cons quietly took him aside and said, "Look, you don't have to shout. They know who you are, so why are you shouting?" It's the understatement that makes it work. Keeffe agreed. "The thing I noticed when I was moving around in that kind of environment, in the background, just listening, was when anyone was making a threat, and I did hear a message go out to hit someone, they speak very quietly. There's no 'Get that fucking cunt!' Rather, it's 'Well, this is definitely out of order, I think he needs a bit of a seeing to. "It's so quiet and that's the real menace.'

Hanson meanwhile was having no joy in hawking the script around. Thames were the first to turn it down, followed by Euston, makers of *The Sweeney* and *Minder*. Luck intervened when Hanson was given a budget of just under £1 million by Charles Denton, Managing

Director of Black Lion Films, run by Lew Grade, with the intention of turning *The Long Good Friday* into a feature film. Next, John Mackenzie was hired and read the script. "It was pretty awful, a bit theatrical and selfconsciously tweedy funny, almost like a *Carry On*, which was totally wrong because we wanted it to be real, but with irony. The essence of the story was there, but it needed an awful lot doing to it."

Pre-production began in earnest at an office acquired in London's famous Carnaby Street. Mackenzie remembered it as "a dreadful place, above a shop that sold tatty old jeans and belted out music all day". The meetings there were intoxicating, producing what Hanson called "high-octane creativity", with ideas being volleyed around between writer, producer and director. Hoskins was also heavily involved, particularly in terms of dialogue, bringing with him as he did the Cockney vernacular. He was responsible for the classic line where Shand, hearing of a fallen comrade's body being taken to the morgue concealed in an ice cream van, says, "There's a lot of dignity in that, ain't there? Going out like a raspberry ripple."

Bob's help did in the end, though, prove something of a strain. Keeffe explained, "Bob doesn't have ideas, he has visions. He's so creative and has such an energy level. He has a different idea every five minutes. Film is a collaborative process, but we had to send him away because he was too inspired. Barry said to him, 'You've got to get a sun tan and look fit for this part.' So they sent him on holiday to Greece. It was just an excuse to get him out of the fucking office for a bit. We had visions of him running up and down mountains but he came back with about an extra stone in weight."

Keeffe's thankless task was to pool everyone's ideas and make them work on paper, building up his original 50-minute TV script to nearly two hours in length for the cinema. Once Hoskins locked him in the office overnight, posting two packets of fags through the letterbox to keep him going.

Keeffe wanted his story to move at a rate of knots, pepper it with his characteristically abrasive dialogue and be visually gripping. "In other films I've seen, you often just get people sitting around tables talking, so I tried to think of imaginative places to put them, like in the abattoir scene. That dialogue with the gang bosses could have been sitting around the table. I think if you're going to see a film, it's got to be something exciting and visual, 'cos you don't remember the dialogue so much, you remember what you see."

Shand's interrogation of a cache of villains strung up on meat hooks is perhaps *Friday*'s dominant image. Mackenzie recalled, "Originally, they were captured in a truck and tied up, that's all. Then we decided to take them to an abattoir, we thought it would be great... but was it hell, it was dreadful!" Mackenzie's idea was to wheel them in on the overhead

rails upside down, just like meat carcasses, which presented its own special problem. "It was a nightmare. The guys were wired so they wouldn't drop on their heads, but we couldn't leave them hanging upside down, especially the bigger guys... one of them started to faint, you know, all their guts drop. So we devised a scheme whereby we kept their legs tied but in between takes ladders were put underneath them and someone would get up and they would be held up and then lowered for the shot. There were quite a few stuntmen in there, and a few cons, too."

By the close of pre-production, eight separate scripts existed and Mackenzie resorted to laying all the copies on the office floor and cherry-picking what was best from each one. Crucially, it was Mackenzie's decision to build up the role of the IRA. "For me, that was the theme of the film, really, it was committed terrorist versus capitalist thug and which wins. I thought that was a very interesting theme because it had never been done before and it gave extra weight to what was a gangster film. We weren't trying to praise terrorism, but it was that these people were committed to their cause and not just to wealth and the glorification of themselves, which was what Harold Shand was all about."

But that left a big problem over the film's title. Hanson liked *The Paddy Factor*; Mackenzie hated it. "You're giving the fucking plot away," Mackenzie argued. "We're not supposed to know it's the IRA." It's only as the film unravels that Shand learns his empire is under threat not from usurping local gangsters but Irish Provos. The subsequent search for a suitable replacement title became something of a *bête noire*, with Hoskins again being the main culprit.

Every few days he seemed to have a new title—*Harold's Kingdom, Havoc, Citadel of Blood* and *Diabolical Liberty*, after one of Shand's infamous expressions. "It was crazy," admitted Keeffe. And it was in desperation that Mackenzie suddenly said, "We've got to have a fucking working title."

With the story taking place over Easter, Mackenzie juggled with the words Good Friday, then, remembering the Philip Marlowe story *The Long Goodbye*, cleverly merged the two together coming up with *The Long Good Friday*: "I said, 'Let's just use that.' So I wrote it on the clapperboard and it sort of stuck, although people kept coming up with new ones. Bob would say, 'I've got another title.' I said, pointing at the clapperboard, 'That's the title!'"

Thoughts now reverted to casting. For the Mafia big-shot Anthony Franciosa, a tough Italian-American actor, was hired. Mackenzie recalled, "But we didn't know at that stage he was badly into the drug scene. After three days on the set, somebody gave him the latest script and he said, 'You mean it's changed?' And we said, 'Well, yeah, yours was a very early edition.' He said, 'I've learnt it all. I'm not a good studier and I could never learn

any more words.' So he took off and went back home." A replacement had to be found... fast. Eddie Constantine, no stranger to the gangster milieu having starred in the cult movie *Alphaville*, was flown over from Paris. Mackenzie believed "he's actually not great in the film because he couldn't remember the words, so we staggered through it, really. But he looks the part, he had this classic gangster look."

Way down the cast, indeed he doesn't even get to say a line, is one Pierce Brosnan. In only his second film, the future 007 plays an Irish hitman. Mackenzie remembered, "Pierce came from my casting director. I didn't know him at all. I said, 'Let's not go for conventional ideas of what IRA guys are like.' We had to have this business of him being a sex trap for this guy at the beginning, so we needed someone who looked good."

Mackenzie later directed Brosnan in one of his best pre-Bond roles as the Russian terrorist Michael Caine hunts down in *The Fourth Protocol*, but very nearly killed him shooting Friday's climactic scene where he holds Hoskins at gunpoint in a car. "That was quite dangerous. Normally, you'd do some of that stuff on back projection in the studio but we just couldn't afford any of that so we had to do it for real with the cameraman in the car, Pierce right next to him and I had to drive. We even had the sound man in the car... unbelievable... people were in the boot, wires everywhere."

From day one, Mackenzie knew how he wanted his film to end, on a big close-up of Hoskins in the back of this car as he comes to realise he's being driven to his death, his face a map of contrasting emotions, arrogance, rage, fear, resignation and finally a begrudging admiration for his opponents. "So I had to drive the damn car and direct Bob in the rear-view mirror. We came out of the Savoy, turned left into the Strand and headed towards Trafalgar Square. It's quite difficult to drive the car and not only watch the actor but cue him. I mean, I was acting with him in a sense, so it's very difficult to take your eye off him, so we nearly crashed. Somehow, magically the Strand was emptyish in front of us, it was about one or two in the morning. But as I got more enthralled with Bob the less I looked down. I thought, Christ, he's doing it, he's absolutely terrific, and I got so involved this fucking bus just missed us because by that time I was hitting Trafalgar Square. Anyway, it didn't hit us, thank God. I could have killed them all."

Besides Hoskins, the most important role to get right was Victoria, Shand's posh bit of skirt. As originally written, Victoria was your traditional gangster's moll, not very bright (in Hanson's words, "a pea-brained tart") who says nothing throughout the movie until the end when she smiles revealing a gob full of bad teeth. "I can't sustain a film with that!" argued Mackenzie, who visualised the character as being much more than an appendage with tits to Mr Big, but strong and effective in her own right. The actress he had in mind was Helen Mirren. "I always thought she was terrific, a class actress. She was well known

but hadn't done much in the way of films. I went to see her, had a long conversation and we sold her on the idea. She was very keen on some sort of film part, she could see that it had a lot of potential."

Like Mackenzie, Mirren's take on Victoria was to turn her almost into Shand's equal, a woman of power and influence. Keeffe set about drastically rewriting the part to fit this new vision. Mackenzie remembered, "I did have a few tussles with Helen, but never in the sense of making her the little lady at the sink because the whole idea was Victoria wouldn't be like that. But, of course, she wanted more, she wanted to be Harold Shand really, she wanted to go out there shooting people. She tends to be that when you see her in those *Prime Suspect* telly things; she's a bit of a ball-crusher with the boys. I used the word 'acolyte' once and she hated it. Maybe I was being too artsy-fartsy. It was in the scene when he's in the shower. Maybe I got a bit carried away with it, I saw it as a symbolic thing, him being cleansed for battle. And I said, 'Bring in his clothes and put them on the bed and burn all the old clothes... I want to make it almost like a Greek thing where you're a sort of goddess or maybe you're the acolyte.' 'Acolyte!' she said. 'Fuck,' I said, 'wrong word, why did I say it?' We had a big fight over that. She eventually did it, but she tried not to and got very silly saying that it made her subservient. 'I've never made a cup of tea for a man,' she said, or something like that. She's a fucking liar, I mean now she does nothing but make cups of tea for her husband!"

The chemistry between Hoskins and Mirren is undeniable and the actress's contribution to the film must not be underestimated. Keeffe had written a love scene. Both are terrified of the IRA coming and out of fear springs sex. But Mackenzie was loath to do it. "I didn't want to see them lash around the floor. I said, 'It's going to spoil it, let's keep the bedroom out of it, or imply it's there rather than have lashings of saliva and all that shit.' Helen agreed totally, which surprised me 'cos I thought she would maybe want that 'cos she likes to show that she's a bit of a sex goddess. We thought of other things to do and then she said, 'I just think it would be great for once we see fear, that she's frightened, wouldn't she be frightened?' And I said, 'She'd be scared shitless, we all would.' She said, 'Well, I think I should just break down and cry.' And I said, 'What a great idea.' Now if I'd suggested it she would have said, 'I never cry! The man will cry.' It was a great idea and it worked beautifully: it made her so human, not weak at all."

As the start date loomed, poor Barrie Keeffe was still thumping away on his typewriter churning out new scenes. 'It was such an endurance test doing that film. By the time I'd typed the end, I think on the Sunday night and filming started on the Monday, I was so knackered. I lost a stone-and-a-half in weight from start to finish and slept for two days when it was all over.' Remarkably, *The Long Good Friday* remains Keeffe's first and only filmed cinema screenplay. It was a pressurised shoot, eight weeks during the fine British

summer of 1979, but joyously harmonious. Many who worked on the film have spoken of it being one of the happiest they'd been on.

Mackenzie, who earned the nickname 'Frenzy Mackenzie', aimed for a film of high style with everything done out on location, much of it around Docklands. Shand's yacht, hired according to Hanson from a business type who'd just had the dubious distinction of being kicked out of Idi Amin's Uganda, was moored at Canary Wharf where today the huge skyscraper stands. Then it was just an open dock with a tatty little shed down one side. Though a building site, you could smell in the air that development and rampant capitalism was coming. In this respect, *Friday* was a very prescient film. The Tories had just swept into power and Shand, the old-fashioned crook-turned-capitalist, was keen to embrace the ruthless free market ideals of the onrushing 1980s. His scheme to set up a semi-legit international consortium to redevelop Docklands using Mafia money made him the bastard offspring of Al Capone and Margaret Thatcher. "He was definitely a proponent of Thatcherism," Mackenzie suggested. "He had the local councillor in his back pocket, which was sort of shades of what was happening with Docklands. There was an awful lot of baksheesh going on. But you felt that entrepreneurial stuff, this mobster extolling the cultural values of London. Maybe Thatcher was inspired by him!"

The Long Good Friday opened in London during February 1981, notching up record-breaking business in some cinemas. It wasn't long before touts were operating in the West End selling tickets for double the face value and, later, even bootleg videos, the dubious quality of which appalled Mackenzie. It was a hit, no doubt due to the near universal critical response. "The first British thriller to even approach the crackling vitality of the classic Hollywood gangster movies," said the *Daily Mail*.

Hoskins was especially singled out for praise. "Not since Edward G Robinson has a character actor dominated a thriller," wrote the *Sunday Times*. Going on to win the *Evening Standard* award for Best Actor and also to be nominated for a BAFTA, Hoskins was catapulted into the big time, becoming one of Britain's biggest film stars in the Eighties. Keeffe remembers with fondness an occasion when he phoned Hoskins up about something soon after the actor had taken off in Hollywood and getting the reply, "What you don't seem to realise, Barrie, is now I'm in a different stratosphere."

Hoskins is a revelation as Harold Shand, blasting through every scene like an Exocet missile, bragging that his gang is "the best organisation since Hitler put a Swastika on his jockstrap". Keeffe noted, "It's Bob Hoskins's film, he gives an absolutely spellbinding performance. I think it's down to Bob why the film is respected as it is." Brimming with Cockney flamboyance, Hoskins manages the bravura achievement of making this thug funny, menacing and tragic. Quite a feat. The shifts from maudlin sentiment to bestial

ferocity are fearsome. It's a facet one suspects that lies not altogether too deep under the surface of the real man. Keeffe observes, "Bob's very funny, also he can be very dangerous. He's got black eyes and when he stares at you he never takes his eyes off you. I would hate to cross him."

Amidst the joyousness of the film's homegrown success, there was tragedy. While *The Long Good Friday* played to packed houses, Keeffe's wife lay dying of cancer in a London hospital. "I never saw the film in the cinema until the 2000 re-release. It was heartbreaking, a sad time in my life. The night of the London premiere I took a video machine to the hospital and a bottle of champagne and we watched it together in the hospital ward."

Despite scoring big in the UK, remaining in the London top ten for 14 weeks, American distributors were reluctant to take a risk on the film. After several months of intense wrangling, a deal was struck again with Avco-Embassy, who'd done so well out of *Time Bandits*. Again, Avco took no risk whatsoever with the film; all promotional costs were guaranteed by HandMade, who also supervised all creativity by way of posters, trailers, etc. It was essential to O'Brien that *Friday* be sold as a mainstream international movie, after the other distributors had dismissed it as fodder for the art houses. It was an amicable arrangement, although Hanson remembers Avco voicing disquiet that O'Brien wasn't prepared to go the extra mile of stumping up cash for television advertising which, in the end, may have been responsible for its restricted release.

Friday's New York opening in April 1982 was not far removed from its London debut in that it met with glowing notices. Renowned critic Judith Crist described it as "the best gangster movie since *The Godfather*" and *US* magazine enrolled Hoskins into the movie's "most illustrious rogues gallery, a criminal roster that includes Edward G Robinson's Little Caesar and James Cagney's Public Enemy". The American public appeared less enthused, however, and Mackenzie puts that down to several factors—the language problem (US prints came complete with a glossary of Cockney terms and their translation—i.e. 'grass': a stool pigeon rather than the stuff you smoke), poor distribution (it didn't play beyond a few big cities) and simply failing to get the joke. Mackenzie believed, "They didn't get the humour because of the old business of irony. I think the Americans are better at it now but in those days you either had a serious film or you had a jokey film, and you can't mix them up. The public enjoyed it, but enjoyed it just as a thriller, they didn't get the laughs."

***Robert Sellers is a former stand-up comedian and the author of the bestselling* Hellraisers *(2009). He has also written biographies of Sting, Tom Cruise, two appreciations of the work of Sean Connery and the definitive book on The Pythons*, Always Look on the Bright Side of Life. *Robert was a regular contributor to* Empire, *Total Film,* Independent, SFX *and* Cinema Retro *and has contributed to a number of television documentaries, including Channel 4's* The 100 Best Family Films.

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS: THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

***The Long Good Friday* had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1980, and its British premiere at the Edinburgh Film Festival the following August. With hardly any exceptions, the response was overwhelmingly positive, with the critics horrified at the thought that the film might receive its UK-wide premiere on television in a substantially cut version. Thankfully, this didn't happen, and the film opened in February 1981, nearly two years after it was shot, to a similarly warm reception, with the *Monthly Film Bulletin* being the most notable naysayer.**

The picture moves at a fantastic clip. Barrie Keeffe has written some characteristically abrasive dialogue, and Bob Hoskins gives a performance that recalls the young Edward G. Robinson in *Little Caesar.* I have doubts about aspects of this film, but it is a polished entertainment, and the fact that the production company, a subsidiary of the Grade organisation, is considering cleaning up the language, toning down the violence and muting the edgy politics to launch it as a TV special makes no kind of sense.

(Philip French, *Observer*, 31 August 1980)

The film is extremely professional in every way and full of good playing. It is further enlivened by a spiky, funny script from Barrie Keeffe. But it is also pretty violent, though not gratuitously so, and television could never accommodate it without substantial toning down. That is why it needs a cinema release and ought to get it. Come on, Lord Grade, this is one of the best films you've been involved with, and you ought to be proud of it. If a man like Mackenzie can't make a feature film, there is really no hope at all for what is laughably called the British film industry.

(Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*, 29 August 1980)

If the problem of the British cinema has been too much talk and too little action then Keeffe and Mackenzie have solved it. Keeffe's script is spare, black, comic; Mackenzie's energetic, well-connected direction confronts violence without relish, as we've come to expect from his television direction of plays like *Just Another Saturday* and *Just a Boy's Game*. London, shot by Phil Méheux, looks exhilarating. *The Long Good Friday* isn't a great statement about crime. But it is a gripping one which also makes sharp statements about Britain today.

(Julie Davidson, *The Scotsman*, 26 August 1980)

The Long Good Friday is a sort of Valentine's Day Massacre transposed to Swinging London. I should say Swigging London, since the amount of expense-account alcohol knocked back in this story of big-business-with-violence Down South and Oop North would probably float the *Titanic*. Never mind, it's all bright, breezy, bloodthirsty story-telling; not much more artful or resonant than an episode of *The Sweeney* but brilliantly acted by Bob Hoskins as the lead hoodlum, with a bruiser's aphorism for all occasions.

(Nigel Andrews, *Financial Times*, 29 August 1980)

A second viewing to be honest, helped straighten out some of the elliptical kinks in the narrative, which sets off with a fair old rat-a-tat of disconnected scenes. There is some jagged brutality on the way to a downbeat denouement, but the overall sense is one of a cocky, even hilarious indomitability rooted in an authentic ground of seediness. In a finely paced and staffed entertainment, Dave King as an inspector on the take, Bryan Marshall as a contractor/councillor likewise, and Derek Thompson as Harold's favourite young thug are horribly probable. And the mean streets, the ritzy restaurants, the waterfront—the sites and sounds—are ours.

(John Coleman, *New Statesman*, 27 February 1981)

It is Hoskins' film. In the gangster days of Cagney, Bogart and Robinson this sort of performance would have made him an international star. Now I'm not so sure that others are all that interested in Britain's little local difficulties. But it is a great portrayal in a movie that disturbingly sees life from the wrong side of the coin.

(Tom Hutchinson, *Now*, 27 February 1981)

Underworld crime, graft and corruption, explosions and Mafia-type vendettas abound in this densely plotted thriller, in which I found the racist insults even more offensive than the violence.

(Virginia Dignam, *Morning Star,* 27 Feb 81)

Bob Hoskins is brilliant as an East End Al Capone plotting to make Britain great again with the aid of Mafia money. The best home-grown thriller in years.

(*News of the World*, 1 March 1981)

A superior, fast-moving and intriguing thriller (...) Bob Hoskins gives a remarkable portrait of the flashy cockney mobster and Helen Mirren makes a classy mistress. Not a film for the squeamish. But a rattling good story.

(Arthur Thirkell, *Daily Mirror*, 27 Feb 81)

This dazzlingly slick East End gangster movie has had a chequered career. Originally to be cut and shown on TV, it was finally rescued for the cinema—and a good thing, too. If for no other reason than that the big screen does full justice to Bob Hoskins's marvellously acute portrayal of a stocky Little Caesar with grand pretensions.

(Margaret Hinxman, *Daily Mail*, 27 Feb 81)

Not since Edward G. Robinson has a character actor, squat as a wrestler, plain as a punch-bag, dominated a thriller as does Bob Hoskins, jingoist, racist, property developer, and mobster tycoon, an Alf Garnett with money in the bank a wicked tongue in his head and, when necessary, a broken bottle in his hand.

(Alan Brien, *Sunday Times*, 1 March 1981)

Despite the heavy-handed emphasis on how English it all is, the film's basic tactic is simply a one-to-one matching of everything one might expect to find in the American version—including turning the IRA into bogeymen to outshine the Vietcong. Rhetoric, in fact, is the order of the day, from the tiresomely elaborate 'puzzle' beginning, to Harold's declarations of murderous intent and patriotic purpose, to the participation of Helen Mirren and Eddie Constantine as the sore-thumb guest stars. *The Long Good Friday* sets out to be a genre movie in a native context, but winds up a blunt, lumpish caricature of one, with all the brassy come-on and hollow ring of something produced for the tourist trade.

(Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1981)

COCKNEY RHYMING SLANG GLOSSARY

When releasing *The Long Good Friday* in the US, various attempts were made to render the dialogue more coherent to American ears. A few lines were revoiced to tone down the East End slang, and theatrical prints opened with a brief glossary that was later expanded for inclusion on American (and some British) home video releases.

Granny: A legitimate business that serves only as a front for criminal activities.

Long Firm: A fraudulent scheme whereby a firm is set up, small orders are placed and paid for to establish good credit, then a massive order is made, its contents quickly sold off (often below par), and the firm vanishes. The warehouse is shut down and the debts, this time huge, are never paid.

Bucket job: aka bucket gaff, a fraudulent company.

Bent: Crooked, illegal.

Bab: Babbler, babbling brook—crook.

Perform: Commit a given crime.

Have it off: To carry out a successful crime.

Percher: A gullible victim for a swindle or con-game.

Money: Nicker, wad, copper, brass, readies, dough.

At the mark-up: Taking an unfairly large proportion of the loot or proceeds from a given swindle, robbery or whatever.

Indoor money: Reserve cash for the use in day-to-day life, rather than proceeds of a given robbery.

Ring the changes: To defraud, to deceive, esp. by passing counterfeit money.

Copping: The practice of bent policemen, of taking bribes from criminals, either to turn a blind eye when necessary, to drop charges, lose evidence, etc.

Bung: Bribe.

On a promise: Awaiting a promised event, possibly money, a bribe, a tip-off, a material, gift, etc.

Police: Cop, greasy, greasy mop, boss, john, filth, copper, grasshopper, dick, bottle and stopper.

Grass: Grasshopper—copper, police informer, stool pigeon.

Nark: Noah's ark—informer.

Get one's collar felt: To be arrested.

Put in acid: To inform against.

Informer: Stinker, dog, rat, fizgig, shopper, talker, word.

Budgie: A talkative person, esp. in police use, a minor informer, from the budgerigar, a popular British caged bird which can be taught to speak.

To inform: Put the bubble in, speak, squeal, shop

Vine: The grapevine, the unofficial underground network for information.

Gun: Gat, fly flat, rod, shooter, Phil the Fluter.

Manor: Precinct, area, turf, patch.

Happy bag: The bag in which the shotgun is carried on an armed robbery; the gun makes the victim happy to pass over his money.

Brown bread: Dead.

Take tea with: To outsmart a clever person or to defeat someone in authority.

Aggravation: The difficulties that both sides of the professional law make for each other.

Knife: Drum and file.

Bombs: Uncle Tom's.

Snuff it: To die.

Nix: To kill.

Ponce: Pimp or fool.

MONA LISA

CAST

BOB HOSKINS as George
CATHY TYSON as Simone
MICHAEL CAINE as Mortwell
ROBBIE COLTRANE as Thomas
CLARKE PETERS as Anderson
KATE HARDIE as Cathy
ZOË NATHENSON as Jeannie
SAMMI DAVIS as May
ROD BEDALL as Terry
JOE BROWN as Dudley
PAULINE MELVILLE as George's Wife
HOSSEIN KARIMBEIK as Raschid
JOHN DARLING as Hotel Security
BRYAN COLEMAN as Gentleman in Mirror Room
ROBERT DORNING as Hotel Bedroom Man
RAAD RAAWI as Arab Servant
DAVID HALLIWELL as Tim Devlin
STEPHEN PERSAUD as Black Youth in Street
MAGGIE O'NEILL as Girl in Paradise Club
GARY CADY as Hotel Waiter
DONNA CANNON as Young Prostitute
PERRY FENWICK as Pimp
DAWN ARCHIBALD as Wig Girl in Club
RICHARD STRANGE as Pornshop Man
ALAN TALBOT as Bath House Attendant
GEOFFREY LARDER as Hotel Clerk
HELEN MARTIN as Peep Show Girl
KENNY BAKER, JACK PURVIS, BILL MOORE as Brighton Buskers

CREW

Directed by **NEIL JORDAN**
Produced by **STEPHEN WOOLLEY**
and **PATRICK CASSAVETTI**
Executive Producers **GEORGE HARRISON**
and **DENIS O'BRIEN**
Screenplay by **NEIL JORDAN** and **DAVID LELAND**
Cinematography by **ROGER PRATT**
Production Design by **JAMIE LEONARD**
Costume Design by **LOUISE FROGLEY**
Edited by **LESLEY WALKER**
Music by **MICHAEL KAMEN**
HandMade Films/Palace Productions, 1986

MONA LISA

by Mike Sutton

When Bob Hoskins died in 2014, the power of his legacy was undeniable. From his television role as Arthur Parker in *Pennies From Heaven* (1978) to Harold Shand in *The Long Good Friday* (1980) to Eddie Valiant in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), he embodied a kind of honest to goodness, no-frills approach to acting which gained the respect of audiences, critics and his peers. But his skill as an actor has often been undervalued. It's not merely his presence, although that's certainly enough to stop you watching anybody else on the screen. It's his technique which, in a very unshowy way, proves to be immensely skilful in the way he gives his characters layers beyond what they initially seem to possess. There's no finer place to see this in action than in *Mona Lisa*, a British Noir in which he plays George, an ex-con who falls in love with the wrong woman in the wrong place at the wrong time, and manages to jump to all the wrong conclusions in the process.

According to Neil Jordan, the inspiration for *Mona Lisa* came from a story in a British newspaper about an ex-convict who was charged with grievous bodily harm and claimed to be "protecting ladies of the night against their Maltese pimps." I've tried, without success, to find this story but it's a perfect peg upon which to hang the story of George, an unlikely white knight in mufti, and his obsession with saving the woman he is hired to drive, Simone (Cathy Tyson), a "tall thin black tart", from her vicious pimp. Clearly, another inspiration is the British crime film, not least in the use of Brighton for the finale; that most English of seaside towns served as a memorable setting for *Brighton Rock* (book 1938, film 1947) and thrillers such as Val Guest's *Jigsaw* (1962), *Quadrophenia* (1979), the little-seen *Smokescreen* (1964), and the Richard Burton gangster movie *Villain* (1971) where it serves as the setting for a nice Sunday afternoon outing for the gangland boss and his old mum.

Essentially, *Mona Lisa* also fits into the gangster genre, dealing as it does with various low-lives; pimps, hard men, ex-cons, and putative big-shots. It shares a connection to the most iconic example of the latter day genre piece, Mike Hodges' *Get Carter* (1971), with the same attention to a specific time and place—1970s Newcastle swapped for 1980s Soho—although the tone of Jordan's film is very different. It's just as brutal in its details as the earlier film but the essential nihilism of Hodges vision is replaced by a sense of longing and, ultimately, a tentative optimism which you could label as a cop-out but actually seems to express a kind of yearning idealism.

You see, George is an unusual leading man for a gangster movie because for all his street-

smarts and convict savvy, he's essentially pure in heart. Not pure in a traditional sense perhaps and he's certainly fearsome when roused, as a pimp finds out when he gets dragged through a car window. But when it comes to love, he's an innocent who believes as fervently in fairytales as any young child might. His heart is on his sleeve, just waiting to be taken and trampled underfoot. There's a wonderful misdirection here in terms of our expectations. George comes on like a bull and within five minutes he's having a barney in the street with his ex-wife. He's got no taste at all and his idea of home is a garage run by his friend Thomas (Robbie Coltrane). But Hoskins gradually reveals George's basic vulnerability and it turns out to be his romanticism. Early on in his relationship with Simone, he begins to tell his story to Thomas and you can see his mind working, thinking out the plot contrivances that will lead to the longed-for happy ending.

Just like Scotty in *Vertigo* (1958), J.J. Gittes in *Chinatown* (1974), or Harry Caul in *The Conversation* (1974), George believes in his ability to become the leading man in a romantic melodrama. He alone can save the innocent girl from the evil that threatens her, never thinking for one minute that he might actually be making the situation worse. Akin to the aforementioned characters—along with Harry Moseby in *Night Moves* (1975) and Philip Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* (1973)—he's a noble fool. Right from the start, conversing with his writer friend Thomas, our hero is complacently explaining how the plot of the most recent novel should have worked out. Most of all, he believes in the conclusion where the princess kisses the frog and he turns into a prince. That this is dangerous should be immediately clear to seasoned Noir watchers—I use the term in a conceptual rather than a stylistic sense. In the rules of the genre, this all too human weakness makes him a target for the manipulations of the powers of worldly corruption.

It seems entirely appropriate given the film's forebears in British cinema that these powers should be represented by Michael Caine who plays the gang boss named, in a delightfully Gothic touch, Mortwell. Caine was on something of a hot streak at the time, following *Educating Rita* (1983) and *The Honorary Consul* (1983), and just before winning an Oscar for his appearance in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986). It was odd at the time to see him appearing in such a small role but his memorably sleazy characterisation casts a shadow over the whole film. Mortwell is a banal monster all right with his white rabbit and his flecked grey suit, but he's still a monster, representing the casual trade in women that lies at the heart of the film. His associate Anderson (Clarke Peters), Simone's homicidal pimp, is, by contrast, merely a physical threat—although Peters gives him a credible swagger.

At the beginning of the story, it appears as if Simone is also going to be an abstract figure, representing the Mona Lisa of the title—"a cold and lonely, lovely work of art." But Cathy Tyson is very fine actress and David Leland is a writer who has always been good with powerful, untypical female roles—the two representations of Cynthia Payne

in *Wish You Were Here* and *Personal Services* (both 1987) being a case in point. Simone is a tremendously complex figure with numerous dimensions and an unnerving ability to change moods on the proverbial sixpence. As the filmmakers intended, she's like the Mona Lisa in that men can project their own thoughts and feelings onto her. It's immediately apparent that she's tough, a survivor with a capacity for endurance that far exceeds that of George. But she's also damaged and vulnerable in ways which a simple soul such as George could never begin to understand. He wants to protect her but the relationship is never so simple and she generally has the upper hand. There's a particularly touching sequence where she dresses him in expensive clothes as if he is some kind of doll, almost inversing the famous "dressing up" scene in *Vertigo.* But what Simone most definitely is not is a femme fatale. Not unlike Evelyn Mulwray in *Chinatown*, she's a fatal woman who is mostly fatal to herself, and the hero is collateral damage at most. Both women use the hero to find a girl, albeit for different reasons, and the hero doesn't realise until too late that he has, essentially, been had.

What makes the relationship between Simone and George so deeply affecting is the essential misunderstanding between them. What George wants most is love and a sense of being not merely needed but wanted. Unfortunately that's exactly the last thing that Simone needs from George and the emotional climax of the film is when he finally understands the situation he's into which he has put himself. Upon realising how he has been used, not only by Mortwell and Anderson but also by Simone, Hoskins is at his most heartbreaking, replying to Simone's question about whether he ever needed anybody with three simple words—"all the time".

George breaks our heart, despite being initially unsympathetic to modern, liberal eyes. His fundamental racism is displayed in the early scenes when he expresses shock at the immigrants who have moved into his old stamping ground. Nor is his attitude to his ex-wife exactly progressive, But this is obviously a realistic depiction of someone of George's age and class and it soon becomes clear that he is far less stereotyped than we expect. His approach to Simone is certainly a touch paternalistic but never limited by either her race or her profession and when he asks her naïve questions after her engagements—"Was it good?"—it's clear that he is sincere and genuinely curious about how she goes about living with her work. He sees no contradiction between seeing Simone both as a "tall thin black tart" and "a lady". At one point he hits Simone when she lets her sharp tongue loose on him and she responds with infernal fury before accepting that he doesn't understand. Paradoxically, it's his inability to fully understand which allows him to rise above the pit in which he makes a living. Sometimes he's a fool, sometimes even ludicrous—never more so than when wearing novelty glasses at the seaside—but he's never needlessly cruel. That's not much, perhaps, but in this world of sleaze it's like a shaft of light in the darkness.

This sleaze is vividly portrayed by Jordan and his cinematographer Roger Pratt, otherwise best known for the equally vibrant worlds of *Brazil* (1985) and *Batman* (1989). The Soho settings are as bright and luminous as the New York locations of *Taxi Driver* (1976), a film which was a reference point for Jordan, and just as dangerous. This is a Soho which is all but gone now, surviving in back streets but largely replaced by trendy bars and licensed adult shops, and it's a sad scene, full of bored-looking girls and badly dressed men with steam cleaning equipment. Even more horrifying is the vision of Kings Cross at night, a kind of steam-drenched hell in which Simone tries to find the girl who she loves. George, it is clear, may be a small-time villain but he's the purest of the pure compared to this. One scene sums this up, an encounter in a small bedroom, strewn with childrens' toys, with a badly beaten teenage prostitute who may be the object of Simone's affections but turns out to be another loose end. It's sad and upsetting, not least for the girl's terror about her pimp's reaction when George refuses to play the part she expects. It is almost certainly not accidental that the scene is heavily reminiscent of the bedroom sequence between Robert De Niro and Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver*.

Quests of one kind or another are a frequent feature in Neil Jordan's work—the search for the paramilitary killers in *Angel* (1982), for theological answers in *The End of the Affair* (1999), for monsters in *The Company of Wolves* (1984). It's possible that the search which underlies *Mona Lisa* is tidied up a little too neatly compared to some in the other films but this is done with a sense of humanity and generosity which is startlingly fresh and mature. The presence of Hoskins and Tyson has a lot to do with this but there's also a vivid humour that constantly bubbles to the surface. Their dialogue exchanges crackle with misunderstandings and cross-purposes, reminding us that they are a classic mismatched couple, and the supporting cast are a vivid gallery of rogues. It's fun to see veteran Joe Brown with a terrible hairstyle as Mortwell's flunky and Rob Bedall is just right as the jack-of-all-trades for whom bartending is as much part of a day's work as finding a girl for a client. Most of all, there is Robbie Coltrane whose warmth provides a much needed contrast to the bleakness of the rest of the film. It's not merely the jokes he tells—upon seeing a dirty video playing he says "Channel 4, is it?"—but his whole demeanour which seems to represent a sense of loyalty and decency which gives George, and ultimately his daughter, a kind of home.

At the end of the film, the plot has resolved, the bad guys are dead and the lovers are reunited. George, in an unforgettable tracking shot which deserves to be as famous as the lengthy closing shot of *The Long Good Friday*, seems to be left out in the cold with nothing. The sheer desperate sadness at this point is almost unbearable and the filmmakers seem to realise this. Against all the odds, they allow George his own kind of happy ending. Perhaps not the one he wanted but a kind of happiness all the same. Even more than that, they allow him self-knowledge and that most elusive quality of all, a hard-won grace.

Mike Sutton has writing about films for most of his adult life. He has written for the British Film Institute's Screenonline project and his work has appeared in* The Third Alternative, Cinema Retro *and* The Huffington Post. *Since 1999 he has been one of the main DVD and Blu-ray reviewers for The Digital Fix. For Arrow, he has written the booklet essays for* The Killers *(1964 version) and* Network, *and also wrote and presented* The De Palma Digest, *included on the* Sisters *Blu-ray release.

MAKING MONA LISA

by Robert Sellers

In 1984, Stephen Woolley of Palace Pictures teamed up with maverick Irish film director Neil Jordan to make the haunting fantasy *The Company of Wolves*. A deep and lasting friendship grew from it—they even, for a time, shared a house—and conversation often turned to what they might do next. *Mona Lisa* was conceived from two disparate sources. A tabloid report about a criminal charged with assault, who pleaded that he was protecting young prostitutes from their pimps, first caught their imagination. Neil Jordan said, "I had this conception of a romantic criminal story, a person imagining himself as a knight in shining armour trying to save these girls from perdition, this terribly naive point of view, mixed in with a London underworld story."

Then, one evening, Woolley was watching a television documentary about some Soho sex entrepreneur. "He came across as being this very wealthy bloke, like a businessman, not at all like a criminal or a rogue. So the idea for *Mona Lisa* came out of this thing about how criminals have changed. How in the Sixties they were like the Michael Caines of *The Italian Job,* and then in the Eighties they were the well-dressed, well-heeled respectable guys, people who would exude the Thatcherite values."

After thrashing out a rough story treatment, Jordan invited television and film writer David Leland to write a screenplay, having admired his work on the uncompromising Made in Britain quartet of TV plays. Leland said, "I was given a very short synopsis, no more than a third of a page, which outlined the basic story of the film. After some conversations with Steve and Neil, I then wrote a first draft." But Leland's script did not meet with overall approval. "Like a lot of David's work," asserted Jordan, "it was very, very hard, very realistic, very tough and quite violent, and it kind of missed the romanticism of what I had in mind. I wanted to make a film about the inarticulacy and confusion of male emotions with regard to women, that area of total misunderstanding between both sexes. So I had a go at the script myself and it gradually changed."

Jordan reworked *Mona Lisa* through six more drafts and Leland was invited back for meetings with both Jordan and Woolley to act as devil's advocate over Jordan's screenplay. "It was a combination of David's work and my own at the end," remembered Jordan, "that's how it grew. The basic crime story was irrelevant, it was in the background. I felt this film was about character, it was about the way people look at themselves rather than what they do. So the movie was kind of a film noir but not a film noir, a love story but not a love story."

Jordan's protagonist is George, an 'honest' villain who comes out of jail and finds himself in a London underworld where good old-fashioned crime has given way to drug trafficking and child prostitution. Finding a job as a chauffeur-cum-minder to Simone, a black West End hooker, he overcomes personal prejudices about her profession and skin colour and slowly falls in love with her. As originally conceived, George was a much older figure and Jordan and Woolley's first choice was Sean Connery.

Woolley recalls, "I met Connery by accident in a lift between meetings at Orion raising money for *Absolute Beginners*. We chased him from golf course to golf course, basically, on the phone. He was very accessible and very easy to talk to; I'd literally call him directly on golf courses and he would answer the phone and say he really wanted to do it. He loved the idea of working with Neil. I think John Boorman had told him Neil was extremely talented and John had worked with Sean on *Zardoz*. And I think Sean has got this Celtic thing about Scotland and Ireland and he was really attracted to Neil. But I don't think he was attracted to the part that much."

Everything changed when Bob Hoskins' name was put forward. "He seemed to me to be the character," Jordan concluded. "I had several conversations with him about it and I rewrote the character with Bob in mind, incorporating his innocence and energy. I would write something and see how he responded to it and then write more dialogue. It was a very fluid experience. He's a brilliant actor and he inhabited that role with the kind of depth that you rarely see in movies."

Watching the film today, it's almost impossible to see anyone else inhabiting that role other than Bob Hoskins. Woolley believes that "there's a sensitive side to Bob. Everyone thought of Bob as *The Long Good Friday* and not *Pennies from Heaven*. *Mona Lisa* was much more that gentle side. He's got that anger from *Friday* but he's confused, he's not like a hoodlum, he's someone who's a bit mixed up and doesn't know what's going on and the world has changed around him and he doesn't know how to cope with it. So Bob seemed to be a perfect idea and EMI, who were backing the film, were very keen on Bob. Then EMI pulled out. They suddenly stopped making films, it was a weird period, they just suddenly said, 'Sorry, we can't do it.' And it was like, 'Oh shit, what are we going to do?'"

It was a problem Woolley could've done without, embroiled as he was at the time in the small matter of shooting the overblown musical *Absolute Beginners*, which had unhelpfully been labelled as the saviour of the British film industry. Woolley now faced major problems in raising the £2 million required for *Mona Lisa*. When it came to the funding of UK films, money was a scarce commodity, despite the existence of HandMade and Goldcrest and emerging companies such as Virgin, who were becoming more entrepreneurial in terms of

the film business, and also Channel 4 who were forging a reputation for backing original and controversial film subjects... though not *Mona Lisa*.

"Channel 4 never gave us any money," Woolley revealed. "They hated Palace. It wasn't until much later that we got serious backing from Channel 4. They rejected *Mona Lisa*, and then later bought it for television from HandMade. That pissed me off. That's why there's a joke in *Mona Lisa* when Bob's watching a porno tape and Robbie Coltrane comes into the caravan and says, 'Channel 4, is it?' That's deliberate because Channel 4 rejected it; they said our script was pornographic, they said you shouldn't make this kind of movie."

Luckily, the line producer on *Absolute Beginners* was David Wimbury, not long back from his Caribbean sojourn on *Water*, who suggested to HandMade's Ray Cooper that he contact Woolley. Cooper was only too happy to visit the *Beginners* set, fascinated with the eclectic people involved like Gil Evans, David Bowie and Ray Davies. Woolley remembered, "We had a very entertaining lunch and I started going on about *Mona Lisa* and Bob Hoskins and, of course, HandMade had released *The Long Good Friday* so they were very pro-Bob. So Ray said, 'I'll have a talk with Denis.' It was a really off-the-cuff thing. EMI literally that week passed on *Mona Lisa*. So Ray took the script, read it, spoke to Denis and I think within two weeks we were sitting in Cadogan Square having a meeting with Denis and doing the deal. It was that fast."

Neil Jordan had already previously dealt with O'Brien and Cooper; they'd asked him about the possibilities of doing some script rewrites, though nothing came of it, and he was looking forward to working with them proper. According to Jordan, "HandMade were perceived as kind of a boutique production company. Very well funded, so they seemed to be able to choose their projects quite carefully. They liked *Mona Lisa* a lot, though Denis O'Brien was very concerned about the seedy and the dark nature of it. Ray Cooper was really the creative force that I worked with at HandMade. He was the supporter of the project. And George Harrison was the nicest man in the world; it just seemed that he paid the bills. He was one of the sweetest people I've ever met in my life."

Although Harrison did not intend to involve himself in the production, he still had to OK the script. Woolley remembered, "We had lunch and he was absolutely wonderful. He said, 'Look, it's not the kind of movie that I really understand completely, but I really love Neil.' We talked a lot about the Pope, actually. He didn't like the Pope very much. He didn't like Catholicism. But George was great."

One thing Harrison was adamant about was nudity. He didn't want any nudity in the film whatsoever. A pretty tall order when your story revolves around Soho, pimps and whores. Jordan said, "It so happened that the first scene we did in the film was where Bob is in

this bath house looking for his boss and he dives into this pool and we had loads of these guys swimming in the pool and, of course, they were naked, as they would be. We couldn't afford proper underwater photography so our cameraman Roger Pratt had this splash camera that you just shove down and vaguely hope to follow what goes on. So, as Bob dived into the water, Roger splashed the camera down and, of course, when we saw the dailies all you see are these dangling penises, about 200 of them. And that was the first shot George saw. He was quite nice about it."

Things were different with O'Brien. Both he and Stephen Woolley repeatedly clashed over creative matters. It was undoubtedly the worst professional relationship in HandMade's history, one that would continue to reverberate right up until the company's final breath. HandMade's Wendy Palmer called it "a personality clash of the deepest order. Both desperately wanted to be top dog."

Woolley was one of those who saw Denis purely as a suit. "Denis was about money. Everybody thought he was this genius with money—give him a fiver and he'll give you 15 quid back. So people were giving him fivers and he was giving them 15 quid back. It was all offshore stuff. I had nothing to do with that. I'm not a money person. I just wanted to get the film made. In my view, Denis saw films as an accountant. It was like factories. There was one factory where people made things, the cameramen, the designers. Then outside of the factory you've got the talent, which was like the crazy professor area where you've got Terry Gilliam and Neil Jordan, you've got writers, the Pythons, they're all doing the crazy clown stuff in there, that's their place. Then you've got the management, you've got Denis and his team of accountants. And anyone like me who's a creative producer doesn't have a home there, you're sort of running from one place to the other, there's no box for you with Denis. He'd say, 'What are you doing here?' Wherever you are at any given point, if you're in the factory with the workers, or you're in the playroom with the talent, or if you're in the management office, you're not welcome. After we did the deal, I think Denis must have imagined that would be the last he'd see of me."

The first rumblings of disquiet were over who to cast in the crucial role of Simone. After extensive tests with numerous actresses, Woolley and Jordan selected Cathy Tyson. Jordan remembered, "I'd just seen her in a play at the Barbican. The casting director, Sue Figgis, said to me, 'Go and see this girl,' so I went to see her and she was quite brilliant, quite beautiful. But HandMade didn't want Cathy. They wanted somebody known and Cathy was totally unknown."

In what Woolley describesd as "one of the most surreal conversations I've ever had in my life", O'Brien told him that he'd been walking past the Odeon Leicester Square and had seen the poster for the latest James Bond film *A View to a Kill* with Roger Moore posing

back to back with Grace Jones. There and then he'd had the brainwave of casting the black pop diva as Simone in *Mona Lisa*. 'Can't you imagine it? Bob Hoskins and Grace Jones standing back to back on the poster.' He pitched. Steve and Neil patently couldn't imagine it. Grace Jones was about a foot taller than Hoskins for a start, so it was going to look stupid. But Denis was convinced about Grace Jones and genuinely baffled as to why Palace were determined to have Cathy Tyson, who was not a star and thus had no market value.

"The whole project almost ground to a halt," Woolley recalled, "and I had to confront Denis over why we wanted Cathy. Denis said, 'OK. I'm going to talk to Ray about it. You have to go away and come back.' So we went out for a cup of tea. I had no doubt in my mind about Cathy, I was determined. And Neil was like, 'Do you think we should do this? Should we confront him?'... blah, blah... 'Maybe there's another way around this.' Anyway, we went back and Denis spoke directly at Neil, didn't even look at me. He said to Neil, 'If you really believe in this actress, then we'll go with it.' Not for one moment did he look at me, he was so angry, he was incensed. And that's what the relationship was like all the time; it was lecturing, no eye contact, no sense of ever feeling you were in the room with him. It was a relationship that was so antagonistic and personal, a personal vendetta, and I never understood it."

After winning the Cathy Tyson battle, the Palace boys were less inclined to go to war when difficulties arose over the music. This being a modern-day movie, it made sense to everyone to incorporate a contemporary pop song. Woolley said, "So we're talking about it and Denis suggests Phil Collins, and we're sort of wanting to be nice because we'd just all had these battles about Cathy, so we're like, OK, we'll go with Phil Collins. Of course, it's not Phil Collins, it's fucking Genesis. And then Denis signed a deal that we've got to put it in the film, so Neil had to cut a whole little sequence of Bob wandering around to this Genesis track. It was just mortifying. It was so like not what we would've done. Denis didn't really have a flair for movies, as such. It was just like somebody told him that Phil Collins was Number 1 in America, so why would you argue with that? Let's do it."

Besides Cathy Tyson's anonymity with the cinemagoing public, O'Brien also had genuine reason to be concerned about her inexperience. *Mona Lisa* was going to be her film debut. But Jordan and Woolley were utterly confident in her natural ability as an actress to be able to cope with the stresses and strains of it all. There was the odd hiccup, though. Jordan remembered, "Cathy didn't really know what films entailed. There was one scene in a hotel room where Bob runs in smacking around the punter who's tied Cathy to a bed or something and she dresses and runs downstairs and goes out to wait for a car. So we had the camera set up at the hotel room and I did one shot and I turned round to do the next take and look for Cathy and nobody could find her. We went through the entire hotel.

Eventually, I walked outside and there she was waiting for the car. And I said, 'Cathy, what are you doing out here?' And she said, 'I thought we were continuing with the scene.' I said, "But the camera's upstairs, Cathy." She said, "Oh, I just thought it followed you.'"

The first few weeks of shooting were difficult for the young actress and it was Hoskins who took it upon himself to guide her through the pitfalls of her first movie. "Bob was fantastic with Cathy," Woolley recalled, "he'd give her so much time. He really enjoys working with first-timers, Bob, he's such a genuinely honest nice bloke, he couldn't stop himself helping you. With Cathy, he recognised that for the film to work, and for him to work, she had to work, and therefore he would do anything to make her work. So he was very patient, instructing all the time, never pulled the big star act with her."

But there was one scene in particular where no amount of soothing would pacify her. It was a sex scene between Simone and George. Jordan had written a scene "where after she and Bob are attacked in a lift by this pimp they go into her room and they're forced to lie in bed together. They don't have sex but something different happens. But Cathy didn't like being naked. I shot the scene but it didn't quite work. It was a scene that I couldn't quite get out of her so I cut it. And I suppose, in the end, I concluded it probably wasn't appropriate in the film anyway."

By this time, Woolley's other production, *Absolute Beginners*, was deep in the editing stage, and deep in trouble, too, with its director Julien Temple barred from the cutting room and the film's main backer Goldcrest in a near state of collapse. Woolley knew that he'd be flitting between the two movies constantly and would need someone to be a rock for him on *Mona Lisa*. So Patrick Cassavetti was brought in to help with the producing chores and filming began in August 1985 on locations around London. Jordan said, "The most difficult thing in the movie was actually turning London into something that was kind of imaginary. I wanted London to be a character, drawing on the memories of when I went there first as a 17-year-old kid from Ireland, and there was this big metropolis and everything seemed strange and dark and mysterious."

The Soho area of the capital was used extensively and, prior to shooting, Jordan and Cassavetti busied themselves with research tours of the district, seeing things through the punters' eyes. "A lot of the stuff in the porn shops we did in a documentary style," said Jordan. "At the time, Soho was nothing but porn—it's a much nicer place now. Back then, it was nothing but little clip joints and peep shows. We shot in quite a few of them. It was very sad, really, a lot of the girls were heroin addicts, serving warm champagne to fat men from the North of England. It was quite like the world the film depicted. The proprietors were fine about us shooting there. Like most vaguely criminal enterprises, they like to be glamorised. We got no trouble. Nobody tried to chop our fingers off."

From this murk and gloom arises George's boss, a filthy flesh peddler called Mortwell, a Dickensian name for a darkly grotesque Dickensian-type villain... and a radical departure for Michael Caine. Although only appearing in a few scenes, it was a courageous risk for Caine to take on so nasty a piece of work. And, over dinner at Langan's restaurant in Piccadilly, it was Ray Cooper who convinced the star to play Mortwell. "Michael said, 'Well, shall I do it? What's it about then? Come on, tell me.' I said, 'It's a great part. It's a lovely cameo.' And he did it, which was very sweet of him."

Palace had wanted Caine for Mortwell almost from the beginning, writing personally to the actor and talking to his agent Denis Selinger, but it was really only after HandMade got on board that Caine was delivered, so important was he to their foreign sales. Jordan recalled, "At the time, Michael was doing an enormous amount of movies, acting in quite a lot of routine thrillers and, for me, it was interesting because he would come on the set, and we only had him for about a week, and he'd be quite impatient—'OK, we can get through this quickly?' And I'd say, 'Hang on, Michael, just try this, will you?' And you'd feel he'd want to get it in two or three takes. And then I'd get him to develop it and develop it and suddenly he wouldn't want to go, he'd be into this thing saying, 'Let's do it this way, let's try this…' It was like a man who really wanted to act seriously and here was a part he could get his teeth into. It was wonderful working with him because he is such a good actor. It was wonderful actually getting him to express the dark-hearted stuff. Michael loved playing that part."

Another small but significant piece of casting was Robbie Coltrane as George's equally sad and displaced friend Thomas. Primarily known then as a television comedian, *Mona Lisa* was Coltrane's first dramatic break in movies. "I'd met Steve Woolley a few times and he thought I would be suitable for the part so arranged an audition. Originally, I was going to play it Cockney but it was Neil that decided on Glaswegian. I can't remember exactly how but I ended up with a spanner in my hand and a 51 Pontiac Fire Chief to drive, so there was no acting required on that account. Neil was always surprisingly unprecious on the dialogue, considering it was his script, and always open to suggestions." Coltrane's casting certainly lent extra spice to the general heady creative mix.

Woolley recollected, "It was something of a liability walking around the streets with Neil, Robbie Coltrane and Bob Hoskins. I'd be frightened if we'd pass a pub because Neil could drink for Ireland, Robbie could drink for Scotland and Bob could drink for England."

Liquid lunches notwithstanding, the entire cast got on extremely well and developed into a tight-knit little group. Coltrane remembers, "Neil and Bob and Cathy were such good company. I was in awe of Bob, he had done a lot of great work, even then, but he was very friendly, had this great 'anti-lovey', let's-get-on-with-the-job attitude, and is very funny so

we got on well. I think it shows in the film. It is important to the plot, of course, because my character is Bob's only friend in the film. I remember Bob getting into a major slanging match with someone in the street when we were filming the scene where he trashes his ex-wife's house exterior. They thought it was for real and told him to behave. Being out and about with Bob in London was exhilarating because he is such East End Aristocracy."

George Harrison also made a brief location visit. He'd been much criticised lately for not making the effort to get involved physically in the movies he financed. One producer told the press that he never met Harrison once and that he would drive up to the location when everyone was at lunch, get out his director's chair, take a few pictures and leave. It was sometimes left to Ray Cooper to impress upon Harrison the importance of putting in the odd personal appearance, meeting the troops, as it were, in the field. "It was always nice when George went on the location and he knew that. And he would always be very generous, without interfering, and it was always a big boost for actors and actresses who hadn't met him to see him. He was always extremely kind to them and interested in what they were doing." As for O'Brien, he was practically invisible. Woolley said, "I don't think I ever saw him on set once. He wouldn't be on set, that would be like the management being with the workers. He lived in Cadogan Square with the money. He was too busy making the money work."

He did, however, occasionally make an appearance at the rushes. And, like Harrison, he did not take kindly to the underwater 'knobs' shot. "Denis looked at the rushes and didn't like them," Woolley remembered, "was very obtuse in his comments, was not nice about anything in the film. And there was a shot of Bob's penis which caused a lot of laughter in the rushes because you start off with this crotch shot and somebody said, 'I know whose dick that is... that's Bob's,' and the camera pans up to Bob and it was very funny. And Denis said, 'What are you doing shooting that kind of thing? You won't get a rating in America.' And I said, 'Of course you will.' And we had this huge argument."

But the big confrontation was yet to come. O'Brien envisaged the film as ending in Brighton, where George has tracked down Simone, and there's a brutal bloodbath in which she shoots Mortwell. This was followed by a shot of Bob rushing down to the beach. O'Brien wanted the film to end at that dramatic moment. Woolley said, "They were literally coming into the cutting room and telling the editor what to do with the film, which to my mind was fucking ridiculous. And people like Ray Cooper, who I really did have a good relationship with, I really loved Ray, were doing his bidding because Ray was being paid by Denis. You see, Denis had people cornered, very few people would go against Denis because of the fiver to 15 quid trick, that's how he got his power. He was a man who could do a lot for you and so when Denis asked you to do a small thing, like 'Oh, can you cut the end of the film off?' people would try and do it. So there was a lot of argy-bargy going on."

Contractually, HandMade had final cut, so technically O'Brien had every right to see his demands carried through. He had, after all, fully financed the picture. Palace only had the UK distribution rights, which they had insisted on during their first meeting with O'Brien, in return for which Woolley and his partner Nik Powell took very low producing fees. But on this point, Woolley was fighting on principle and confronted O'Brien. "Look, if you cut the end of the film, it's just about this whore who's, like, evil." O'Brien turned to Woolley and, with utmost seriousness, said, "Well, what else is it about? It's about a whore who deserves her comeuppance."

That take on the movie was about a million miles from Woolley and Jordan's; their preferred ending had Tyson returning to see Bob one last time to explain her motives. "So it's not about all that anger that happened in Brighton," Woolley explained, "and you realise that George has come on a journey. At the beginning of the film, you see him as a racist, a person who hates women. At the end of the film, he's someone who understands a person who's both black and a woman. So this was about someone who was able to change through the events that he saw, that his view of the world was probably not the best view to have. That was a really important thing to me and I would have done anything to stop Denis destroying the film."

By this time, O'Brien had acquired a reputation for 'meddling' in post-production. Certainly he enjoyed and, to some, exploited his position as executive producer. Perhaps such behaviour was merely an extension of his personality, in that he was a very impulsive and decisive man. Wendy Palmer believes, "Denis was a man who never doubted himself for a second. He was autocratic and didn't brook any arguments. And what he used to do when he got into the cutting room was terrible. He'd get a video and he'd cut the films himself. He'd go into the video-editing suite with a video of the rough cut and play around for a weekend and come up with his own version. He did that a few times. He might even have done that to *Mona Lisa*. It was horrifying. Then he'd hand them the video cassette and say, 'Here it is.' That used to get people cross. And people wouldn't watch it. There'd be all sorts of rumpuses over that. That was one of his favourite things to do."

Though, to be truthful, it's difficult when you hold the purse strings not to want to impose your own views on a production if you have a vision yourself of what it should be like. But in the opinion of many, O'Brien took this privilege to extremes. Terry Gilliam's viewpoint is, "Post-production, that's the time as a filmmaker when you're most vulnerable. You've just spent a year working on this thing, you're actually shagged out, and now this guy is telling you stuff and you say, 'Look at the films that have come before and they've been big successes, maybe he knows what he's talking about.' And you're very vulnerable then and I think Denis abused that position."

But with Palace, O'Brien had more than met his match. Unbeknown to him, Woolley had a major ace up his sleeve. He was close friends with both Chris Blackwell, head honcho of Island, and Carey Brokaw, who ran Island's film distribution arm Island Alive which planned to release *Mona Lisa* in the States. Woolley knew how important the American distribution for *Mona Lisa* was to HandMade's financing and personally showed the film to Brokaw and informed him of the problems it was facing. Brokaw reached for the phone and made a personal call to O'Brien, stating that if the ending of the film was altered in any way, Island would refuse to distribute it in America.

"And, of course, Denis went bonkers," Woolley grinned, "and I don't think we've ever spoken since then. I was in LA and I got Carey to make the call and Denis was dining at Balmoral. We're not sure who he was dining with but it's rumoured to have been the Queen Mother. And he said, 'Don't call me on this number unless it's an emergency.' And I said to Carey Brokaw, 'Call him, it's an emergency. Call him now.' And we got him out of dinner with the Queen Mother. And we won. He never changed the ending. When it came down to it, Island Alive's advance was more important to HandMade than their opinion of what should or shouldn't be in the film."

As the film geared up for release, word of mouth within the industry was of nothing else but Bob Hoskins. Like *The Long Good Friday*'s Harold Shand, Hoskins made George his own, vulnerable and poignant, yet in a flash capable of headbutting a thug or smashing a pimp's face in. It was a sensational performance, one of the best given by a British actor during the 1980s. And Hoskins was suitably rewarded for it. He was voted Best Actor by the Los Angeles Film Critics and the National Society of Film Critics in New York. He also received a coveted Golden Globe. Hoskins was his usual self-effacing and joking self about such triumphs. "Usually, all an award means is that it puts you out of work for 18 months because no one thinks they can afford you."

When *Mona Lisa* was entered into competition at Cannes, Hoskins became the first English actor for two decades to receive the Best Actor Award. He'd arrived at the French resort with his wife and Neil Jordan, but left again for London after the film's gala showing. Woolley recalled, "I didn't leave Cannes. Denis and everybody else had pissed off and I said, 'No, we're going to win this award.' And then they all flooded back on the Monday when he won it. I said to Neil, 'I'm not going back. I'm not getting on the flight. I'm staying because I think Bob's going to win it. How can he not win?' I loved the film so much, how could these people not give him the award? So we stayed and Bob did win it and they had to bring Bob back on a private plane. Cannes was also hilarious because we'd walk down the Croissette and Denis would come towards me and then he would cross the road just so he wouldn't have to acknowledge my existence. We just really, really upset him."

Mona Lisa opened in the States in June 1986 to good business for a British movie. The critical reaction was extraordinary, and fully justified. "Neil Jordan has chiselled a dark, sleazily glamorous gem," oozed *Newsweek*; *USA Today* acclaimed "The most affecting love story in recent memory"; *LA Weekly* thought Hoskins had given "the performance of the year"; and the *Village Voice* declared that "if *Mona Lisa* doesn't grant Hoskins semi-stardom, nothing will"

The film's modest but significant success in America did much to raise the profile of Neil Jordan, essentially putting his name on the international movie map. "It did well all over the world. I never saw any money out of it, but it did very well. It was at a time when independent movies like that never got released in the States, really. Looking back on it today, I think it's quite lovely. Every time I see a movie that I've made, I can't disconnect it from the person I was at the time. So, to me, it's a perfect expression of all those emotions I was going through at the time."

The success of *Mona Lisa* also did much for the profile of Palace Pictures who, certainly in media circles, seemed to be the ones getting all of the plaudits. Another case of HandMade not banging its drum loud enough. Brian Shingles recalled, "The Palace boys had problems with Denis. It was HandMade's money that made *Mona Lisa* and they took the acclaim and glory for it and that really infuriated Denis and everybody else."

Opening in London in September, where it broke the all-time house record at the Odeon Haymarket, *Mona Lisa* played successfully across Britain and garnered near universal press acclaim. "A film of the first rank which sets a benchmark for British cinema," said the *Daily Telegraph*. *The Mail on Sunday* regarded the film as "the most extraordinary movie to come from Britain this year". Not surprisingly, Hoskins received the lion's share of the plaudits. "It is a performance of remarkable subtlety, observation and compassion and it puts him in the forefront of contemporary British actors," said the *Sunday Express*

Mona Lisa was indeed the making of Bob Hoskins. His new status was confirmed when that year's Oscar nominations were revealed and he found himself in the exalted company of Paul Newman, William Hurt and James Woods for the Best Actor Award. No one, least of all Hoskins himself, was really surprised when Newman won for *The Color of Money*. Six times nominated, surely the Academy weren't going to shaft him a seventh time. Consolation arrived at the British Academy Awards. The ceremony was held at some grand West End hotel and Bob won. He'd been the favourite. But, even in victory, the chasm between the two sets of filmmakers responsible for *Mona Lisa* was plain to see. Woolley remembers, 'There was me, Nik and Neil on one table, and Denis O'Brien and all the HandMade people and Bob Hoskins on the other table. It was a real "us" and "them". And I think we even had to buy our own table for the BAFTAs.'

Mona Lisa remains the archetypal Bob Hoskins movie. It's a piece of work of which he was as proud as anything else he had accomplished in cinema. "If I popped off tomorrow," he once said, "I would feel that I'd left something behind that was worth it." It's a sentiment shared by others. Coltrane said, "I loved doing *Mona Lisa*. It was the first time I had done a proper movie with people I really identified with. It established me in a cache of players, like Jim Broadbent, who ended up in a raft of interesting British films of the Eighties. I am eternally grateful. The only hard part for me was when they cut a Jaguar in two to make filming easier! We used to play 'Mona Lisa' on the radio, the only thing that still worked, to help our concentration. It's tough on those low-loaders, there is a lot of noise and the crew are very close, plus people shout and peep their horns, and then the background doesn't match, so there are always lots of takes, so you go round the route again. So we'd rewind the tape, have a quick blast of old Nat and we'd be ready for take ten. Whenever I hear that song, I'm right there in the Jag. Happy memories."

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS: MONA LISA

One of British cinema's biggest critical hits of 1986, *Mona Lisa* had already received warm welcomes following its Cannes premiere in May and US theatrical release in July, before it opened to an equally enthusiastic reception in its native Britain in September.

A lesser actor might have verged into caricature of the innocent dummy who, having fallen for the girl, has to pursue her missing prostitute friend through what one might call the bowels and sluices of London. But Hoskins, sensing that there is genuine tragedy here as well as comedy and character-building, avoids the Cockney act he could do standing on his script, and carefully avoids over-playing. It is, in a way, the reverse side of his underworld boss of *The Long Good Friday*, and I think the better one. But it does depend on good direction, which is what he gets.

(Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*, 4 September 1986)

A movie that lugs you along with it from first to last shot. It goes deeper and deeper into gangland vice until you leave carnal matters and come out into a spiritual inferno that courts comparison with Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*—and can withstand it.

(Alexander Walker, *Evening Standard*, 4 September 1986)

There is more than a touch of *Taxi Driver* about *Mona Lisa*: red light districts, heroes who are outsiders, prowling the streets from the seclusion of cars, revolted by the corruption they see, especially that of girls barely more than children. Though it is unlikely that Jordan gave Martin Scorsese's film more than a passing thought when he wrote the script, it is the nearest a British film has come to a convincing account of urban street lie and the coldly business-like corruptions it conceals.

(Ann Totterdell, *Financial Times*, 5 September 1986)

I have to say that Bob Hoskins occasionally seems too intelligent for the simple hood he is playing, but his other advantages are overwhelmning. Cathy Tyson rightly remains a cypher as Simone. Michael Caine shows further evidence that he can act when he wants to.

(Charles Clover, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 September 1986)

Mona Lisa is Jordan's most confident film so far, but his least original. Beneath the surface sophistication, there is something trite and unfelt in the conception. What maes it work as a cinematic experience is the acting—of Cathy Tyson and most especially the astonishing Bob Hoskins. Except for a single brief scene towards the end of *Mona Lisa* he's before the camera from the opening shot to the fade-out, and his George is a rich creation—touching, menaching, embarrassing, frightened, concerned, funny, vulnerable. Hoskins' East End gang boss in *The Long Good Friday* invited comparison with the best character acting of Hollywood's golden era. This performance confirms that he is the peer of Edward G. Robinson.

(Philip French, *The Observer*, 7 September 1986)

Romanticist films are comparatively rare in the British cinema, especially those that eschew whimsy for a hard edge. Jordan looks as though that is his direction, and the promise is good. He has skilfully orchestrated the film towards a brilliant, terrifying and appropriately cynical climax. Jordan captures an oddly exotic view—perhaps a Dubliner's view—of the darker sub-strata of London and its seamier pleasures, and photographs it like a Bangkok travelogue.

(George Perry, *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1986)

It is rare for a novelist such as Neil Jordan to have so strong a visual sense (or, rather, it is not often that a novelist gets the chance to make his own films), but *Mona Lisa* provides clear evidence that he has been able successfully to combine a literary and a cinematic sensibility. This is not a film that bears the blight of Channel 4, with an unreconstructed social realism carrying the added penalty of a 'message'. This is a picture conceived on an ambitious scale. At the end its melodrama triumphs, and a certain self-indulgence seeps through the resulting cracks but, nevertheless, *Mona Lisa* shows every sign of being *thought through*, with all its disparate elements coming together to form a complete statement.

(Peter Ackroyd, *The Spectator,* 13 September 1986)

The film is a thriller and has some effective moments, but suffers by comparison with American originals. Its plot, for one thing, has echoes of various rather tougher films (*Taxi Driver*, *The Hardcore Life*) and, in any case, thrillers with a British setting tend to seem tame because of the shortage of guns. It's a small price to pay, weakened genre movies for safer streets, but it damages British films that attempt American territory.

(Adam Mars-Jones, *New Statesman*, 12 September 1986)

An excitingly gritty mixture of the tragedy of prostitution and man's exploitation of women. At times shocking, but always compulsive, *Mona Lisa* is only spoilt by racist stereotyping in casting the only two black people in the film as a prostitute and a pimp. The casting of American actor Clarke Peters as the pimp also means that black British actors are overlooked once again.

(Kolton Lee, *The Voice*, 6 September 1986)

In a wistfully photographed London and Brighton, a tale of gang warfare, sex, pornography and love is played out in a way that offers no answers, is often quite suspect as to its motives, but is nonetheless beguiling. Mirrors confuse, linked fantasy elements creep in when you least expect, and every emotion is subverted and converted. The mysterious Black prostitute is undoubtedly an exotic stereotype, the father/daughter relationship and the whole notion of family, dubious, and the way in which women are never known and only seen, problematic. But this is a film which will send you reeling and—perhaps even unconsciously—set you thinking.

(Amanda Lipman, *Spare Rib*, September 1986)

APACHES

CREDITS

Directed by **JOHN MACKENZIE**
Produced by **JOHN ARNOLD** and **LEON CLORE**
Written by **NEVILLE SMITH**
Cameraman **PHILIP MÉHEUX**
Editor **BARNEY GREENWOOD**
A Central Office of Information Film
for the Health & Safety Executive

APACHES

by Patrick Russell

For a good decade, unbeknownst to Britain's adult, urban majority, this remarkable short film—directed by John Mackenzie three years before *The Long Good Friday*—busily scared the bejaysus out of a generation of rural schoolchildren (present author included), in the cause of saved lives and limbs.

Apaches was produced for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) through the Central Office of Information. The COI was a government agency which between 1946 and 2012 was responsible for literally thousands of films on all manner of subjects produced on behalf of numerous government departments and agencies. Undoubtedly, it's best remembered today for its 1970s public information films *Apaches* being among the most devastatingly effective. Its impact can be gauged by its long shelf-life: prints were still circulating right up to the very last stand of 16mm film beneath the onslaught of video-cassette in the mid- to late eighties. During that period it was also broadcast several times by ITV companies, like Westward and Anglia, whose franchises covered agricultural areas.

Re-viewed through adult eyes, it is *Apaches*' cut-price crossbreed of filmic forms that most intrigues: one part documentary to two parts drama and three parts fable. It plays like a Children's Film Foundation caper injected with heavy doses of B-Western, B-Horror and hints, even, of Bergman and Buñuel. Its public-service function supplies a carefully compiled catalogue of the hazards of modern farms, and a final, factual roll-call of recent fatalities (some thirty deaths annually had triggered the HSE's campaign). But its title credits borrow the Playbill typeface of Westerns from *Stagecoach* (1939) forward and Mackenzie deploys camera setups evoking their action highlights. By Hollywood standards, production values are below Poverty Row. And this is no Monument Valley: *Apaches* was shot, fast, on a Home Counties farm in February 1977, its cast six children from a Maidenhead junior school. The point of the genre borrowings was not mere playful pastiche. The six play Cowboys-and-Indians in a lethal modern setting, and the film's own magic-realist storytelling is governed by the illogical logic reigning over the netherworld of childhood play and imagination. One by one the Apaches die, yet curiously they continue their adventures (punctuated by abruptly arty flash-forwards) to their grim conclusion.

The Central Film Library (the COI's distribution arm) routinely charged for print hire but made exception for major safety campaigns. Hence *Apaches* was distributed free of charge. Supported by a small advertising and mailshot campaign, it rapidly broke the Library's booking records. For production, the COI had engaged Graphic Films, a production company which, under the highly respected producer Leon Clore, specialised in hiring and trusting highly creative behind-camera talent when making industrial, government and charity films (before Mackenzie's day, Clore had provided a career-crucial haven for directors including Lindsay Anderson, John Krish, Anthony Simmons and Karel Reisz). Clore was allocated a budget generous by the COI's 1977 standards affording a running-time that was unusually long by this stage in COI history. But that's another way of saying that by any other standard, *Apaches* was shot on a shoestring. Its cheapness fittingly underscores themes shared with many post-war Westerns whose TV reruns young Apaches everywhere so enjoyed. Love of life, homestead and hearth are our bulwarks the only ones in a landscape cruelly, tragically and absurdly indifferent to our welfare.

Patrick Russell heads the non-fiction team at the BFI National Archive, and has led several major archival projects drawing on the British tradition of documentary and non-fiction filmmaking. His curatorial specialism is the history of industrial and sponsored film, and their equivalents in today's contemporary corporate media. He co-edited the books* Shadows of Progress: Documentary Film in Post-war Britain *(2010) and* The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon *(2004) and is the author of* 100 British Documentaries *(2007) and several chapters in edited collections.

This limited edition box set features the first High Definition release of* Apaches*, which was supplied by the BFI National Archive. The BFI has released dozens of other COI films via The COI Collection, an ongoing series of two-disc DVD editions.

APACHES SCRIPT EXCERPT

by Neville Smith

191. INT. ROOM IN BAR - DAY.

M.C.S. Bottles in f.g. CAMERA TILTS UP revealing SHARON and the other children coming into the room. They walk forward. CAMERA TRACKS BACK before them. The children look at the old farm implements.

MICHAEL
What are these?

SHARON
They're my Grandad's.
He collects them.

MICHAEL
What are they for?

SHARON
I don't know. They used
to be used on farms.
It's his hobby.

MICHAEL
Oh.

SHARON
Hey, what are you doing?

192. M.S. ROBERT & DANNY.

DANNY pours liquid out of bottle into brown cup. MICHAEL enters cam. L.

DANNY
In celebration of our
victories we will drink
the white man's firewater.

ROBERT
Huh. Some hope.

MICHAEL
Hey, this would make
a great gang hut.

193. M.C.S. SHARON

SHARON
I don't think my Grandad
would let us. But you
could use my Wendy House.

194. M.S. MICHAEL, ROBERT & DANNY walk forward and sit down.

ROBERT
Wendy House, I don't fancy that.

DANNY
Come on, let's have a drink.

ROBERT
I'm not drinking that.
You don't know what it is.

195. M.S. SHARON moves L-R and sits beside ROBERT, MICHAEL & DANNY. CAMERA PANS with her.

SHARON
Well just mime it.
Like we did in
the school play.

MICHAEL
It might be poison.

ROBERT
Yes. It kills the rats.

DANNY
No it isn't poison. It
doesn't look like it.

MICHAEL takes cup from DANNY and smells it.

MICHAEL
It smells okay.

DANNY

Here, give me that.

196. M.C.S. DANNY's hands take cup from MICHAEL. CAMERA TILTS UP as DANNY holds cup above his head - then he lowers it and mimes drinking from cup.

DANNY
Me Geronimo Chief of
tribe.

He passes cup R_L to MICHAEL. CAMERA PANS with cup. MICHAEL raises cup above his head, then lowers it and mimes drinking from it.

MICHAEL
Me have many stallions.

He passes cup R-L to ROBERT. CAMERA PANS with cup. ROBERT raises cup above his head then lowers it and mimes drinking from it.

ROBERT
Me have many scalps.

He passes cup R-L to SHARON. CAMERA PANS with cup.

SHARON
Me kill many warriors.

She drinks from cup - spits liquid out of her mouth.

Oh it's horrible.

ROBERT
Watch it, Sharon.
It's gone onto my jacket.

197. M.S. MICHAEL & DANNY over SHARON.

MICHAEL
Mime you said.

198. M.C.S. SHARON

SHARON
I forgot.

199. M.C.S. DANNY

DANNY
You all right Sharon?

200. M.C.S. SHARON

SHARON
Yeah I think so.

She looks down.

201. M.C.S. DANNY

202. M.C.S. SHARON smacks her lips.

203. EXT. FARM - DAY - M.L.S. SHARON, ROBERT, DANNY & MICHAEL walk forward from barn. The three boys wave to SHARON and move out cam. L. SHARON walks L-R to gate. CAMERA PANS with her. She walks L-R up path to front door and goes in closing the door behind her.

204. M.S. ROBERT, DANNY & MICHAEL walk in cam. L. They move along road L-R. CAMERA PANS with them.

ROBERT
That stuff went right
through to my clothes.
My Mum is going to kill me.

MICHAEL
Let's have a look.
Crikey!

They stop and look at Robert's jacket.

ROBERT & MICHAEL walk out cam. R. DANNY looks out cam. R. DRUM BEATS.

205. M.S. SHARON's front door. DRUM BEATS.

206. M.C.S. DANNY looking out cam. R, then exits cam. R. DRUM BEATS END.

207. EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - M.S. Farmhouse. Bedroom light comes on cam. R.

SHARON

(screaming)
Mummy.

Second bedroom light comes on.

Mummy.
(screams)

208. INT. SHARON'S BEDROOM - DAY - M.S. - High Angle - Sharon's mother takes her clothes out of drawer and puts them out cam. L.

209. M.S. Sharon's mother's hands lift ornaments off dressing table and put them in box. She moves box out cam. R.

210. M.S. High Angle - shooting past mobile in f.g. turning slowly in breeze, down onto Sharon's bed with bedclothes piled up at top of mattress.

210A. M.C.S. Two cut glass bottles. Fire flickering in b.g. CAMERA TRACKS BACK to laid dinner table.

DANNY'S VOICE OVER
I don't see what grown-ups get out of it. Except a lot of drink. And they can get that in the pub. They don't need to come to the house to get it. Mind you, sometimes I like it, when they all get drunk and dance around with you. And give you money. I like that. That's fun.

ABOUT THE RESTORATIONS

The Long Good Friday has been exclusively restored in 2K resolution by Arrow Films.

The original camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan and was graded on the Baselight grading system. The film's original Director of Photography Phil Méheux oversaw the colour grading for this project.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Image stability, density fluctuation and other picture issues were also improved.

The film's original mono soundtrack was transferred from the original magnetic reels, and audio issues such as bumps, clicks and audible buzz were repaired, minimised, or removed.

This restoration of *The Long Good Friday* was completed in 2K resolution with all work carried out at Deluxe Restoration, London.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Restoration services by Deluxe Restoration, London:
Film Scanning: Paul Doogan, Bob Roach
Film grading: Stephen Bearman
Restoration Supervisors: Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker
Restoration Technicians: Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire
Restoration Management: Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones
Audio Transfer: Dominic Thomas, Gary Saunders/Deluxe 142

Special Thanks to Phil Méheux, Peter Hannan and HandMade Films

Mona Lisa has been exclusively restored in 2K resolution by Arrow Films.

The original camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan and was graded on the Baselight grading system. The film's original Director Neil Jordan and Director of Photography Roger Pratt oversaw the colour grading for this project.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Image stability, density fluctuation and other picture issues were also improved.

The film's original mono soundtrack was transferred from the original magnetic reels, and audio issues such as bumps, clicks and audible buzz were repaired, minimised, or removed.

This restoration of *Mona Lisa* was completed in 2K resolution with all work carried out at Deluxe Restoration, London.

Director Neil Jordan has approved this restoration.

Restoration Supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Restoration services by Deluxe Restoration, London:
Film Scanning: Paul Doogan, Bob Roach
Film grading: Stephen Bearman
Restoration Supervisors: Tom Barrett, Clayton Baker
Restoration Technicians: Debi Bataller, Dave Burt, Lisa Copson, Tom Wiltshire
Restoration Management: Mark Bonnici, Graham Jones
Audio Transfer: Dominic Thomas, Gary Saunders/Deluxe 142

Special Thanks to Neil Jordan, Roger Pratt and HandMade Films

Apaches was mastered by the BFI in High Definition from the best film elements available.

Telecine grading: Gerry Gedge, Prime Focus, London

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Book Produced by Michael Brooke
Executive Producer: Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer: James White
Production Assistants: Louise Buckler, Liane Cunje
QC and Proofing: Michael Brooke, Anthony Nield
Authoring and Subtitling: David Mackenzie
Artist: Matthew Griffin
Design: Jack Pemberton, Matt Armstrong

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Carlotta Barrow, BFI National Archive, Christopher Byers, Daniel Bird, Carl Daft, Mark Duguid, Sam Dunn, Tony Dykes, HandMade, Barry Hanson, Mike Heap, Simon Hinkly, John Hodson, Maggi Hurt, Neil Jordan, Barrie Keeffe, David Leland, Colin Lomax, Debbie Mason, James McCabe, Phil Méheux, Marc Morris, Roger Pratt, Patrick Russell, Robert Sellers, Alexei Slater, Rod Smith, Starz/Anchor Bay, Mike Sutton, Marcus Tustin, Mark Upton, Stephen Woolley

FURTHER READING

The exhaustive, eye-opening and sometimes jaw-dropping history of HandMade Films, *Very Naughty Boys: The Amazing True Story of HandMade Films* (Titan Books, 2013), includes detailed production histories of all the films associated with the company, from *Life of Brian* (1979) to *Nuns on the Run* (1990). Excerpts of this book are included here but the full text comes highly recommended and can be purchased from Titan Books.

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