



Silent Cinema

Silent Sherlock: Three Classic Cases

A Scandal in Bohemia

Director: Maurice Elvey
Production Company: Stoll Film Company
Scenario: William J. Elliott
From the story by: Arthur Conan Doyle
Photography: Germain Burger
Art Direction: Walter W. Murton
Cast:
Eille Norwood (*Sherlock Holmes*)
Hubert Willis (*Dr Watson*)
Madame D'Estere (*Mrs Hudson*)
Joan Beverley (*Irene Adair*)
Alfred Drayton (*King of Bohemia*)
Miles Mander (*Godfrey Norton*)
Annie Esmond (*maid*)
UK 1921

The Golden Pince-Nez

Director: George Ridgwell
Production Company: Stoll Film Company
Scenario: Geoffrey H. Malins, Patrick L. Mannock
From the story by: Arthur Conan Doyle
Photography: Alfred H. Moise
Art Direction: Walter W. Murton
Cast:
Eille Norwood (*Sherlock Holmes*)
Hubert Willis (*Dr Watson*)
Teddy Arundell (*Inspector Hopkins*)
Norma Whalley (*Anna Coram*)
Cecil Morton York (*Professor Coram*)
UK 1922

The Final Problem

Director: George Ridgwell
Production Company: Stoll Film Company
Producer: George Ridgwell
Scenario: Geoffrey H. Malins, Patrick L. Mannock
From the story by: Arthur Conan Doyle
Photography: Alfred H. Moise
Art Direction: Walter W. Murton
Cast:
Eille Norwood (*Sherlock Holmes*)
Hubert Willis (*Dr Watson*)
Tom Beaumont (*Inspector Gregory*)
Percy Standing (*Professor Moriarty*)
UK 1923

Total running time: 102 mins

With recorded score composed by
Joseph Havlat, Neil Brand and Joanna MacGregor

Restoration funded by Iron Mountain.
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Skey Charitable Trust and Cockayne – Grants for
the Arts: a donor advised fund held at The London
Community Foundation.

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The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes series, which was so popular it ran for 45 episodes, was sanctioned by Arthur Conan Doyle, who thoroughly approved of Eille Norwood as Holmes. This programme features a selection of three episodes: *A Scandal in Bohemia*, wherein Holmes falls for ‘the woman’; *The Golden Pince-Nez*, which features Holmes’ deductive powers at work, and *The Final Problem*, featuring the sinister Professor Moriarty. Before the films, Neil Brand will read from one of Conan Doyle’s classic Holmes stories.

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Numerous actors have portrayed Sherlock Holmes on the big screen over the course of the past century, but nobody comes close to Eille Norwood, who starred as Arthur Conan Doyle’s legendary sleuth in 45 shorts and two features for Stoll Pictures between 1921 and 1923. The entire Stoll Collection of Sherlock Holmes films has been restored by the BFI, funded by Iron Mountain’s Living Legacy Initiative, and the first fruits of that invaluable effort were screened at last year’s London Film Festival Archive Gala, which took place in the suitably Victorian surroundings of Alexandra Palace.

The event premiered three of the restored two-reelers, with each short accompanied by an ensemble from the Royal Academy of Music playing newly commissioned scores. *A Scandal in Bohemia* (1921) was scored by Joseph Havlat, and *The Golden Pince-Nez* (1922) had music from Neil Brand – both compositions perfectly complemented the playful tone of these mysteries. Joanna MacGregor – who conducted all three performances while simultaneously playing the piano – came up with a more sombre and suspenseful soundtrack for *The Final Problem* (1923), apt for a film in which Holmes appears unusually rattled, having apparently met his match in underworld kingpin Moriarty.

What’s striking about these films is how well they distil the essence of Conan Doyle’s stories into 20-odd minutes of screen time, efficiently setting up the mystery, deduction and solution, and inserting flashbacks to reveal key details. Directed by the reliable hands of Maurice Elvey and George Ridgewell, the witty and involving productions move at a snappy pace towards satisfying endings. *The Final Problem*’s literal cliffhanger is dramatically staged, and it drew a pleasing gasp from some audience members.

But the real draw in these films is Norwood – an authoritative presence, and a largely understated performer (although he has a good deal of fun with the many disguises Holmes adopts). There’s a marvellous moment when Watson (Hubert Willis) is fretting about Holmes missing the train, only for the moustachioed passenger next to him to remark, ‘My dear Watson, why don’t you say good morning?’

Arthur Conan Doyle himself was hugely impressed by Norwood’s work. ‘He has that rare quality, which can only be described as glamour, which compels you to watch an actor eagerly even when he is doing nothing,’ the author said. ‘He has the brooding eye which excites expectation and he has also a quite unrivalled power of disguise.’ Everyone has their favourite Holmes portrayal, of course, but the long overdue restoration of this complete film series will give modern audiences the opportunity to discover the man who set the standard for all screen Sherlocks to come.

Philip Concannon, bfi.org.uk

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Distinguished stage actor Eille Norwood (1861-1948) is remembered for being the most prolific actor ever to play Sherlock Holmes on screen and stage. He portrayed the famous sleuth in 45 two-reelers across three serials: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1921), *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1922) and *The Last Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1923), plus two features, *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1921) and *The Sign of Four* (1923).

In 1923, Norwood returned to the role in a Sherlock Holmes play written specifically for him, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, which opened on the West End. The play was acclaimed by public and critics alike and toured the UK and internationally. Norwood still holds the record for having appeared in more Sherlock Holmes films than any other actor connected to the role.

Each generation has its own on-screen Sherlock. Today it is Benedict Cumberbatch; in the 1980s Jeremy Brett; and in the 1940s Basil Rathbone, and they define the look and manner of the master detective of their era. For the silent period, the great cinematic Holmes was Eille Norwood. Norwood was the Holmes who had the stamp of approval from Arthur Conan Doyle himself, who publicly praised his performance.

'There have been a number of silent Sherlock films previously restored, but the scale of this project to restore an important part of the screen Sherlock canon is on another level,' says Bryony Dixon, curator of silent film at the BFI National Archive. 'We are delighted that Holmes film fans from across the world will at last be able to enjoy Eille Norwood's performance as the great detective. The restoration is a mammoth undertaking and we are grateful to have the support and commitment from Iron Mountain in helping us realise this project, what an adventure!'

'Sherlock Holmes is one of the most famous literary characters of all time, but he's more than just a character,' says Lance Podell, senior vice president of Iron Mountain Entertainment Services. 'Sherlock Holmes is an enduring emblem of observation, intelligence and mystery whose tales have enamoured fans around the world, including all of us. IMES's mission is to protect and activate precious archives, preserving our collective cultural heritage. In this way, we are thrilled to work with BFI to support the restoration of the Stoll Pictures Sherlock Holmes film series so that these films can be shared and enjoyed for generations to come.'

About the restoration

All 45 episodes of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series and two feature films produced by the Stoll Picture Company (1921 to 1923), the rights of which were later acquired by the Really Useful Group as part of their acquisition of Stoll-Moss Theatres, have been restored at the BFI National Archive's Conservation Centre by a team headed by Elena Nepoti, Bryony Dixon and Ben Thompson. Using a combination of the original negatives acquired by the BFI from Stoll Pictures in 1938, as well as later preservation masters, the team of 12 restorers working on these Holmesian mysteries have reconstructed the films to their original versions and reconstructed the intertitle design, where there have been missing or single frame intertitles to work from. In some cases, they have brought back the original tint colours as seen on first release and removed the effects of a century of wear and tear on these unique films.