

'Treasure trove' of film records unlocks history of British Cinema

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A film historian at Queen Mary, University of London has been uncovering the secret past of British cinema in a private collection of production records for thousands of films, including such iconic titles as Dr No, The African Queen, and Zulu.

The unique production archive is owned by Film Finances Ltd, underwriters of many major British films made since the 1950s. The company has kept complete documentation for every production it has guaranteed, including letters, telegrams, shooting schedules, scripts, storyboards and even doctors' certificates.

In 2009, Film Finances (FF) invited Charles Drazin, from the Department of Film Studies at QM, to delve among the millions of papers that it has accumulated over the past 60 years.

Astonished to find such a wealth of material, Drazin told the company that they were sitting on the "single most important collection of primary materials relating to the history of the post-war British [cinema](#). Adds Dr Drazin: "The archive also provides an unrivalled insight into the production challenges of each film and the personalities involved."

In 2011, Dr Drazin wrote A Bond for Bond, a book documenting Film Finances crucial role in the making of Dr No, the first ever Bond feature; FF stepped in when the film ran substantially overbudget.

Over the past year, Film Finances has been compiling an inventory of

papers for 600 films made between 1950 and 1980 that it intends to make publicly available. Already some of the world's most important film libraries, including the British Film Institute, are keen to acquire and curate the collection.

Some Snippets from the FF Archive:

Progress report for The African Queen, 7 June 1951:

"The African Queen was found to have sunk this morning but the unit managed to pull her out of the water by 1pm. At 11am half the unit went down to the raft and lined up. The other members carried on helping to get the boat up."

Bond producer Harry Saltzman offers a recipe for success in the movies during the shooting of Dr No (18 February 1962):

"Cubby and myself feel very optimistic about the commercial possibilities of this picture. I feel we should recover our entire production cost out of the UK. The picture has size, movement, excitement and no message."

Film Finances representative Colin Lesslie spots an unlikely star during the shooting of Zulu (31 March 1963):

"I am very glad to be able to tell you that in my opinion and from the little he has done so far, Michael Caine as 'Bromhead' is very good indeed. When he was cast for the part I couldn't see it but I think (and hope) I was wrong."

Cy Feuer, producer of Cabaret, expresses his gratitude to Film Finances consultant John Croydon (13 March 1972):

"I look back on our association with a great deal of pleasure and I particularly enjoyed our experience together in Berlin. I'll always think of you as the coach who laid out the game plan and then sent me in during the last period to sew up the victory."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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