


HIPPODROME
silent film festival
celebrating film with live music
WEDNESDAY 16 - SUNDAY 20 MARCH 2022
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The Unknown © 1927 WB

The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots (1923)

Opening Night Restoration World Premiere: Wednesday 16 March

Pre-film Talk: Donald Smith

Performing Live: Andy Cannon, Wendy Weatherby, Frank McLaughlin, and David Trouton

Queen of Hearts: Mary Queen of Scots in Popular Culture

This long lost and newly restored version of *The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots* is a real eye-opener. The film joins together an illustrious catalogue of Marys on the screen, but stands out as an accomplished, emotive piece of storytelling. It is also a master class in the acting and directing styles required by silent films.

The film raises some interesting questions. Firstly, given the resurgence of interest in our history, you might think this is an exclusively Scottish thing, but you would be wrong. The film is an international catalogue embracing Britain, Hollywood, Germany and Sweden, so far. Mary clearly has box office pull far beyond Scotland.

In fact, until more recently, the Mary films have some dubious relations with Scottish history, often blithely re-organising or fictionalising events. This is because the films are focussed on Mary as an individual character. A passionate, impulsive, and tragic woman, who just happened to be Queen of Scots. She falls in love, and others fall hopelessly in love with her. In the end, Mary throws herself on the mercy of her cousin, Elizabeth I of England. Elizabeth herself is regularly portrayed as woman suppressing her feminine nature in order to rule 'like a man'. So Elizabeth becomes the perfect foil, fearing and envying Mary her capacity to sway hearts. In real, life they never met.

So why is Mary portrayed in this way? And why are these ideas about Mary so strongly embedded in popular culture? Have we been fed a biased version, or is it we ourselves who want to relate to a Queen of Hearts? And that of course leads to another fascinating question: how does this image match up to what the historical sources tell us?

There are many popular ideas of Mary exemplified in films in bravura style. The illustrious succession of actors who have portrayed her tells it all - Fay Compton, Joan Crawford, Kathleen Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave,



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Saoirse Ronan.... But *The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots* stands out as an early masterpiece. It is a defining repository of emotive stories, that appear again and again in later films. The Queen of Hearts is put centre stage and given star treatment. There is I suggest nowhere better to begin our exploration of Mary Queen of Hearts, as generations have desired to know and love her. At the same time, this defining film is also an invitation for an alternative contemporary Mary to step out from the shadows, and be recognised in her own right.

Queen of Hearts: Mary Queen of Scots in Popular Culture is a pre-screening talk by **Donald Smith** which will celebrate the legend of the Scottish Queen. The event will take place at the Hippodrome and will be live-streamed via YouTube with BSL interpretation and live captioning.

Notes on the Digital Restoration

When acquired, what is thought to be the only surviving print of *The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots* was found to have "Vinegar Syndrome." This is a deterioration process which occurs in cellulose acetate-based films whereby the acetic acid within the film reel gives off an odour very like vinegar. Effected films shrink, become brittle and eventually form a solid mass, making preservation impossible.

The film was a 16mm print made in the early 1930s. It was in fairly good condition, except for this serious problem covering about a third of the reel. Luckily, the print had not started to shrink but it did have blobby silver deposits on the surface, making the original image very difficult to see. After having a print laboratory clean by the BFI, the film surface still had silver deposits. The cleaning seemed to have loosened some of the surface particles forming, and formed a white powder which in tests most could be polished off using specialist film-cloths. Many years ago, the laboratories had polishing machines which would be used to clean grubby copies and rejuvenate the print to prolong its life. Sadly, no laboratory or film specialist has any of this equipment anymore.

Most of the "Vinegar Syndrome" deposits could be removed just by hand buffing the surfaces. This process took over a six months but eventually, both sides of the print affected with the problem were systematically buffed just enough to remove the deposits but not enough to damage the delicate emulsion itself.

When the job was completed, the affected film was digitally rescanned by "The Film Room" run by Jim Groom at Pinewood Studios who at two frames a second put the film through his film scanner. The film then had to be



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stabilised, eliminating any vertical or horizontal image movement. It then required grading so the brightness and contrast was even throughout, Jim Groom also did this laborious work to great effect.

The intertitles presented a problem as many parts of each title were too light or too dark due to faulty grading when the print was first made. Many titles also had visible negative damage showing up as white flashes. As we did not want to freeze just one frame, but give the impression of running titles. The answer was to find the frames of each title which were in the best condition. These good frames were then duplicated to cover the poor areas of each title. The only titles that were found to be missing were the main and credit titles which were recreated by the film historian and graphic artist, Glenn Mitchell.

*The film's restoration was carried out by **Bob Geoghegan** (Archive Film Agency) and **Tony Fletcher** (Celluloid Tapestry).*

Director. and Screenwriter. Denison Cliff | UK | 1923 | U | 2h incl. Narration

With: Fay Compton, Gerald Ames, Ivan Samson, John Stuart, Ellen Compton, and Edward Sorley

Screening material and restoration courtesy of Archive Film Agency and Celluloid Tapestry

BSL-English supported event

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