



PROJECTING THE ARCHIVE

Trottie True

(aka The Gay Lady)

Introduced by BFI Curator Josephine Botting.

Based on a popular 1946 novel, *Trottie True* can be related to the Victorian music-hall world of *Champagne Charlie* (d. Alberto Cavalcanti, 1944) and *Gaiety George* (d. George King, 1946), set against the background of the Gaiety 'musical comedy' shows.

From the opening credits (over a red heart emblem) the central question is evident: who will win the heart of Trottie? The candidates are obsessed balloonist Sid Skinner; serious-minded aristocrat Lord Digby Landon; 'bounder' Maurice Breckenham; backer of Gaiety Shows Arthur Briggs and fellow artiste Joe Jugg, but morose Digby and dull balloonist Sid are the main contenders. Whereas Trottie is a spirited gal, vivacious and lively, these men are a rather dull bunch, lacking in any genuine gaiety or charm, so Jean Kent is able to shine with her central star performance; not surprisingly, this was her favourite film role.

The early vitality of the Bedford music-hall scene is not maintained, and a major omission is the lack of a fully staged Gaiety number, especially as in 1948 there were still survivors around familiar with the original stagings. But Rank were wary of funding lavish musicals following the 'disaster' of *London Town* (d. Wesley Ruggles, 1946) and Jean Kent even had a struggle to keep her songs in the film. The music score, by Benjamin Frankel, is full of old world charm with a delightful opening 'trot' theme and waltzes such as the wistful 'Dreaming', composed in 1911 by English 'waltz king' Archibald Joyce, so evocative of the Edwardian era.

There is much to enjoy in *Trottie True*, but these are mainly surface pleasures. Both art direction and colour are first class, with much eye candy in colour and form, art direction, and detail in costumes and millinery. Harry Waxman's cinematography nicely differentiates the emotional temperatures of the True family home, with its warm, dark colours, and the Wellwater stately pile, in cold, light blues. Visual treats include an early close-up of a bird in a gilded cage (bride as trophy?), Gaiety Girls travelling to a picnic in their white dresses and finery, Bounce's dressing room bedecked with flowers, and a lavish servant's ball. British 1940s Technicolor films offer an abundance of visual pleasures, especially when lovingly restored by the BFI National Archive. *Trottie True* is not among the best known, but comes beautifully packaged, gift wrapped with all the trimmings.

Roger Philip Mellor, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Jean Kent (1921-2013)

In Anthony Asquith's 1950 film *The Woman in Question*, a murdered woman is presented via several flashbacks through the eyes of different characters who knew her. From slovenly to prim and proper, these diverse interpretations of the victim are played with considerable skill by the star of the film, Jean Kent.

Born Joan Mildred Field in Brixton, South London in June 1921, Kent's parents were music hall artistes and she became a dancer and chorus girl at a young age. Her film career began in 1935 but really took off when she was signed to Gainsborough and appeared in a string of their costume melodramas, including *Fanny by Gaslight* (1944), *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945) and *Caravan* (1946).

It was this last title which the BFI screened in 2011 in celebration of Kent's 90th birthday, when she appeared before a large and appreciative audience who joined in an enthusiastic rendition of 'Happy Birthday'. I was fortunate enough to act as her host on that occasion and found her charming and unpretentious; clearly overwhelmed by the wonderful reception the public gave her, she sent us a warm letter of thanks.

She was delighted that we chose *Caravan* to celebrate her career – she had very happy memories of that film as it was during the shoot that she met her future husband, Jusuf Ramart, who had a small role. They were wed four months later, with Stewart Granger as best man, and their marriage lasted until Ramart's death in 1989.

Caravan is perhaps Gainsborough's most camp and over the top excursion into melodrama but Jean Kent wasn't fazed by the audience's laughter at some of its excesses. She had no illusions about the artistic merit of the films, but communicated the fun she had making them and the escape and exoticism they brought to people during the post-war years of privation.

In *Caravan* she plays a Spanish gypsy who nurses an amnesiac Stewart Granger, falling in love with him along the way. While her accent doesn't quite ring true, she looks stunning in her lavish costumes and the provocative dance she performs is about as sexually charged as British cinema was permitted to be at the time.

Post-Gainsborough, she proved herself a versatile actor, playing a juvenile delinquent in *Good-time Girl* (1947), a music hall star in *Trottie True* (1949), and the cruel, unfaithful wife in *The Browning Version* (1951).

As the 1950s drew to a close, her film roles began to dry up and despite some television work and a small part in *Shout at the Devil* (1976), her acting career came to a premature end. Although she was keen to continue working, she was unfairly overlooked. While her Gainsborough co-stars Margaret Lockwood and Phyllis Calvert were both given their own TV series' (*Justice*, 1971-74, and *Kate*, 1970-72, respectively) Kent was offered no such small-screen comeback. But she showed no trace of bitterness and lived out her life in the Suffolk countryside, welcoming fans and researchers into her home with grace and hospitality.

She was perhaps the most naturally beautiful of the female stars which Gainsborough transformed into huge box-office draws in the 1940s. Her smile could be winning, provocative or downright menacing, while her voice had just a touch of huskiness. Her passing breaks one more link in the chain connecting us with the golden age of British cinema.

Josephine Botting, bfi.org.uk, 10 December 2013

TROTTIE TRUE (AKA THE GAY LADY)

Director: Brian Desmond Hurst
Production Company: Two Cities Films
Executive Producer: Earl St. John
Producer: Hugh Stewart
Associate Producer: George Pitcher
Assistant Director: Peter Bolton
Screenplay: C. Denis Freeman
Based on the novel by: Caryl Brahms, S.J. Simon
Director of Photography: Harry Waxman
Technicolor Colour Consultant: Natalie Kalmus
Associate to Colour Director: Joan Bridge
Editor: Ralph Kemplen
Art Director: Ralph Brinton
Set Dresser: Colleen Browning
Dress Designer: Beatrice Dawson
Makeup Supervisor: Tony Sforzini
Hairdressing Supervisor: Vivienne Walker
Music: Benjamin Frankel
Songs: Carroll Gibbons
Music played by: Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
Music Director: Muir Mathieson
Sound Recording: John Cook, Desmond Dew
Sound Editor: Harry Miller
Studio: Denham Studios

uncredited
Production Executive: Herbert Smith
Unit Manager: Frank Sherwin Green
Assistant Production Manager: Victor Wark
Producer’s Personal Assistant: Jean Scott Rogers
1st Assistant Director: Mark Evans
2nd Assistant Director: Guy Wilsdon
3rd Assistant Director: Denis O’Dell
Continuity: Elizabeth Everson
Casting Director: Maude Spector
Camera Operator: Harold Haysom
Technicolor Technician: Ken Gray
Clapper Loader: John Morgan
Chargehand Electrician: John McCloud
Stills (Location): Paul Langford-Brown
Stills (Publicity): Norman Gryspeerdt
Stills (Studio): Frank Bellingham
1st Assistant Editor: Patricia Murray
2nd Assistant Editor: Gerry Hambling
Assistant Art Director: Betty Pierce
Draughtsmen: Bill Holmes, Alec J. Henshaw, Edward Marshall, R.B. Augner
Production Buyer: Leslie Hogg
Construction Manager: Jim Tillyer
Wardrobe Supervisor: Harry Haynes
Wardrobe Mistress: A. Jordan
Make-up Assistants: Sid Turner, Stella Morris
Assistant Hairdressers: Joyce Wood, Pearl Bremner, Vera Franklin, Joan White
Sound Recordist: Derek Barclay
Boom Operator: Fred Ryan
Assistant Boom Operator: Stan Ward
Sound Maintenance: W. Young
Assistant Dubbing Mixer – foreign version: Peter T. Davies
Publicity Manager: Ken Green
Publicity: Anthony Firth

Cast

Jean Kent (Trottie True)
James Donald (Lord Digby Landon)
Hugh Sinclair (Maurice Beckenham)
Lana Morris (Bouncie Barrington)
Andrew Crawford (Sid Skinner)
Bill Owen (Joe Jugg)
Harcourt Williams (Duke of Wellwater)
Michael Medwin (Monty, Marquis of Maidenhead)
Hattie Jacques (Daisy Delaware)
Joan Young (Mrs True)
Heather Thatcher (Angela Platt-Brown)
Mary Hinton (duchess)
Francis De Wolfe (George Edwardes)
Harold Scott (Mr True)
Dylis Lay (Trottie, as a child)

uncredited
Irene Browne (Duchess of Wellwater)
Mary Jones (Gladys True)
Daphne Anderson (Bertha True)
Carole Lesley (Clare)
Sam Kydd (‘Bedford’ stage manager)
Christopher Lee (Hon Bongo Icklesham)
Ian Wilson (Bert, stage hand at ‘Gaiety’ theatre)
Michael Ward (pianist at ball)
Roger Moore, Patrick Cargill (stage door johnnies)
Tony Halfpenny (Perce True)
Laurel Dudley (little girl with German band)
Gretchen Franklin (Martha)
Ian Carmichael (Bill the postman)
Shaun Noble (Andy Galloway)
D’Arcy Conyers (Claude)
Helen Goss (Mrs Bellaire)
Elspet Gray (Honor Bellaire)
Katharine Blake (Ruby Rubarto)
Olwen Brookes (Lady Talman, 1st dowager)
Doris Rogers (Hon Mrs Seaton, 2nd dowager)
Len Sharp (Carter)
May Hallatt (old Ellen)
W.E. Holloway (old Vinegar)
Jusuf Ramart (Monty’s chauffeur)
Arthur Hambling (Jupp)
Norman Hartley, Dennis Wood (grooms)
Anthony Steel (Bellaires’ footman)
Natasha Wills (debutante daughter)
Elsie Wagstaff (dependant relative)
Diana Maddox (Sid Skinner’s girlfriend)
John Vere (Bellaires’ butler)
Anne Holland (Countess of Burney)
Philip Strange (Earl of Burney)
Howard Douglas (newspaper editor)
James Neylin (Lord George Peasemmarsh)
Tamara Lees, Constance Smith, Margaret Sullivan, Natalia Potocka (Gaiety girls)
June Bardsley, Barbara Gurnhill, Josephine Stone (Mayfair girls)
Joy Adams, Beth Ross, Joy Frankau, Josephine Ingram, Stella Conway, Pamela Galloway, Betty Deverell (special girls)
John Boston, Peter Dunlop, Edward Leslie (escorts)
Anthony Tancred, John Fabian (stage door johnnies)
John Morley, Neville Gates, Peter Norris, Stephen Jones (special young men)
Lyndon Brook, Philip Stainton, Charles Perry, Anthony Adam, John Dennis (extras)
Pamela Devis

UK 1948
91 mins

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