



PROJECTING THE ARCHIVE

Murder in the Family

Murder in the Family

Director: Al Parker

Production Company: Fox-British Pictures

Assistant Director: Roy Goddard

Screenplay: David Evans

Story by: James Ronald

Photography: Ronald Neame

Assistant Camera: Oswald Morris

Editor: Peter Tanner

Art Director: Carmen Dillon

Recordists: John Cox, Cecil Mason

Studio: Wembley Studios

Cast:

Barry Jones (*Stephen Osborne*)

Jessica Tandy (*Ann Osborne*)

Jessie Winter (*Edith Osborne*)

Evelyn Ankers (*Dorothy Osborne*)

David Markham (*Michael Osborne*)

Glynis Johns (*Marjorie Osborne*)

Roddy McDowall (*Peter Osborne*)

Annie Esmond (*Aunt Octavia Osborne*)

Rani Waller (*Miss Kathleen Emily Mimms*)

Donald Gray (*Ted Fleming*)

A. Bromley Davenport

Stella Arbenina

Edgar K. Bruce

David Arnold

Clare Arnold

Charles Childerstone

W. Simpson Fraser (*Police Sergeant Feathers*)

Wilfrid Hyde White (*Purvitt, the estate agent*) *

UK 1938

76 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive Print

* Uncredited

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Introduced by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator

Following the death of a rich elderly aunt, a suspicion of murder falls on the extended family, plunging them into turmoil.

The slender plot of this Fox-British quota film, based on a 1936 crime novel, is enlivened considerably by director Parker and an expert homegrown crew. Carmen Dillon's set designs, and the camerawork of Ronald Neame and Oswald Morris, make for a stylish film with occasional surreal visuals. But the main draw is its top-notch performers. Headliners Jessica Tandy and Evelyn Ankers went on to Hollywood stardom but are upstaged here by Roddy McDowall and Glynis Johns as the children of the brood.

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A contemporary review

Dramatic murder story. Aunt Octavia is an extremely wealthy, and equally unpleasant old lady, and when she visits her half-brother, Stephen Osborne, and finds him and his family in despair because he has lost his job, she refuses help. Reproached for this, she redrafts her will, leaving money intended for Stephen to charity, and £1,000 a year to her maid, Miss Mimms...

The film moves slowly and is of the stage-play kind, but good acting keeps up the interest. Barry Jones is convincing as Stephen Osborne; Jessica Tandy is good as the fiery Ann, and Evelyn Ankers is charming as Dorothy. The two children, Peter and Marjorie, are excellent.

Monthly Film Bulletin, February 1938

Quota quickies

In June 1937, the Association of Cine-Technicians calculated that, of the 640 production companies registered over the previous twelve years, only 3 per cent had films in production, and at least 85 per cent would never make another picture. Even before the new Films Act became law, exhibitors were expressing fears that there would be a grave shortage of what had become their 'bread and butter' picture as far as programming was concerned.

However, there was to be one final fling. In January 1938, Paramount alone had four films in production at four different studios, and in March, the final month of the first Quota Act, there was a veritable stampede to register second features before the rules changed. Films were being registered at a rate of more than one per day, with that single month accounting for almost twice as many supporting features as the whole year that followed. Ace registered six Windmill revue films, all directed by R.A. Hopwood, and Widgey Newman's company registered five pictures, three of which he directed himself. They may have been dashed off before the deadline, but not all of these quickies disappointed film fans: one reader in Richmond wrote to *Film Weekly* to recommend Fox's *Murder in the Family* as 'well worth seeing' thanks to its excellent story.

Steve Chibnall, *Quota quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (BFI, 2007) Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing. © Steve Chibnall