



## MARTIN SCORSESE SELECTS HIDDEN GEMS OF BRITISH CINEMA

# The Legend of Hell House

### The Legend of Hell House

Directed by: John Hough

©: Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Presented by: Academy Picture Corporation

Production Company: Pilgrim Productions Limited\*

Released by [US prints]:

Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation

Released by [GB prints]: Fox-Rank Film Distributors

Executive Producer: James H. Nicholson

Produced by: Albert Fennell, Norman T. Herman

Production Manager: Ron Fry

Assistant Director: Bert Batt

Continuity: Gladys Goldsmith

Casting Director: Sally Nicholl

Screenplay by: Richard Matheson

Based on his novel 'Hell House': Richard Matheson

Director of Photography: Alan Hume

Camera Operator: Tony White

Photographic Effects: Tom Howard

Special Effects: Roy Whybrow

Editor: Geoffrey Foot

Assistant Art Director: Kenneth McCallum Tait

Sets Designed by: Robert Jones

Wardrobe Mistress: Eileen Sullivan

Make Up: Linda Devetta

Hairdresser: Pat McDermott

Music and Electronic Score by:

Brian Hodgson of Electrophon Ltd,

Delia Derbyshire of Electrophon Ltd

Sound Recordists: Les Hammond, Bill Rowe

Dubbing Editor: Peter Lennard

Technical Advisor: Tom Corbett

Made at the: EMI-MGM Elstree Studios

Cast:

Pamela Franklin (*Florence Tanner*)

Roddy McDowall (*Ben Fischer*)

Clive Revill (*Dr Chris Barrett*)

Gayle Hunnicutt (*Ann Barrett*)

Roland Culver (*Rudolph Deutsch*)

Peter Bowles (*Hanley*)

Michael Gough (*Emeric Belasco*)\*

USA-UK 1973©

95 mins

35mm

A BFI National Archive print

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**SIGHT AND SOUND**

**Edgar Wright:** I wanted to ask about the last film, in terms of chronology, on the list: *The Legend of Hell House*. I've always loved it and I always think it's interesting because Pamela Franklin is in both *The Legend of Hell House* and *The Innocents* [1961]. To me, *The Innocents* is one of the most subtle evocative horror films, whereas *The Legend of Hell House* as a counterpoint is like John Hough hitting you in the face with a brick – in a great way! It's all those low wide angle shots.

**Martin Scorsese:** Well, that's the style of it. It's a serious horror film. It really is. It didn't evade the issue by shocking cuts and what they call now jump scares. It really placed you in that house and it had a creepy feel to it, especially the ghost who takes down the covers of the bed, and then she gets in the bed and then they find her in the morning and she's got scratches on her. It had a sense of a deeper element of evil. The sense of evil in that house – it's titillating in terms of the eroticism of the picture, and what do you do with those wide angle lenses as you say. It certainly was a companion piece for me for *The Haunting* [1963].

Martin Scorsese and Edgar Wright interviewed by James Bell, *Sight and Sound*, October 2024

The eerie world of the unknown, psychic phenomena the things that go bump in the night are given a fascinating new dimension in *The Legend of Hell House*.

In planning the production of Richard Matheson's screenplay based upon his best-selling novel, the late James H. Nicholson, President of Academy Pictures, made it clear from the beginning that this would not be just another haunted house movie. There were to be no ghostly clichés: none of the creaking doors, flapping shutters and hooting owls scare routines of the past. This tale of a house in the grip of a 'supernormal' force would show for the first time on the screen a kind of psychic warfare involving theories scientists say could well be true.

The terrifying battle between evil forces and the exorcistic counter-forces directed against them would in no way be treated as fantasy. 'We will play the whole thing for all-out real,' became Nicholson's *Hell House* theme for the producers, director and actors.

To fill the roles of the four investigators of what may or may not be ghostly presences in a Victorian mansion outside of London, Nicholson chose Pamela Franklin, Roddy McDowall, Clive Revill and Gayle Hunnicutt. For Miss Franklin, it was a return to the world of ghosts she inhabited as a child actress in her very first movie, *The Innocents*. In that she played a child possessed.

Albert Fennell, who co-produced with Norman T. Herman, is credited with more than 50 films and 100 television productions, including the internationally popular *The Avengers* series. One of his most acclaimed films was *The Innocents*, in which he and Pamela Franklin first shared ectoplasmic experiences.

It was during the making of *The Avengers* that Fennell met a young technician and was so impressed with his enthusiasm and intelligence that he gave him his first directing assignment. The technician was John Hough, director of *Hell*

## MARTIN SCORSESE SELECTS HIDDEN GEMS OF BRITISH CINEMA

### Shooting Stars

Sun 1 Sep 11:30; Mon 9 Sep 20:40

### Brief Ecstasy

Tue 3 Sep 18:30; Wed 11 Sep 20:35

### The Man in Grey

Fri 6 Sep 18:10; Tue 17 Sep 20:40

### This Happy Breed

Fri 6 Sep 20:40; Tue 24 Sep 18:00

### The Seventh Veil

Sat 7 Sep 15:10; Wed 25 Sep 20:40

### Green for Danger

Sun 8 Sep 15:40; Thu 26 Sep 20:55

### It Always Rains on Sunday

Sun 8 Sep 18:10; Fri 27 Sep 20:50

### Hue and Cry

Sat 14 Sep 20:30; Mon 30 Sep 18:15 (+ intro by Josephine Botting, Curator, BFI National Archive)

### Uncle Silas

Sat 14 Sep 18:20

### Terence Fisher Double Bill:

#### To the Public Danger + Stolen Face

Sun 15 Sep 18:10; Tue 1 Oct 20:30

### Mandy

Mon 16 Sep 18:35; Sat 28 Sep 12:20

### Yield to the Night

Fri 20 Sep 18:00; Sat 28 Sep 15:10

### The Flesh and the Fiends

Sat 21 Sep 14:50; Wed 2 Oct 20:40

### The Damned

Sat 21 Sep 20:40; Fri 4 Oct 18:30

### Station Six Sahara

Sun 22 Sep 12:30; Sat 5 Oct 16:00

### The Mind Benders

Sun 22 Sep 18:00; Wed 2 Oct 18:20

### Went the Day Well? + intro by James Bell,

Senior Curator, BFI National Archive

Mon 23 Sep 18:20

### The Pumpkin Eater

Fri 27 Sep 18:00; Sun 6 Oct 15:00

### Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde

Sat 28 Sep 18:10; Thu 3 Oct 18:15 + intro by

Sam Clemens, son of Brian Clemens

### The Legend of Hell House

Sat 28 Sep 20:40; Mon 7 Oct 18:20

### Guns at Batasi

Sun 29 Sep 18:20; Sat 5 Oct 18:20

### With thanks to

Martin Scorsese and Edgar Wright

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*House*, whose last effort was directing Orson Welles in a new version of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Hough calls *The Legend of Hell House* a hard film to define. 'It's not a horror movie and it's not fantasy. It's certainly a terrifying thriller – but a thriller with a difference.'

What attracted him to the project was its realism, says Hough. 'I've been involved with psychic investigators and they all assure me that the theory about hauntings and psychic phenomena it puts forward could be true. Scientists don't discount the theory either. There could be such a power as that described in the story and according to scientific experts, it could be eliminated in the way shown in the film. So we're not presenting something that is outrageous or false, but examining a theory seriously accepted by many scientists as possible.'

To ensure that scenes involving psychic phenomena accord with what is factually known about the subject, Nicholson engaged Tom Corbett, England's most famous clairvoyant and psychic consultant, to act as technical advisor. For location scenes, Corbett was also asked to find an English country house, genuinely reputed to be haunted, and resembling architecturally, the one described in Richard Matheson's story.

Corbett suggested Wykehurst Park, a gabled Victorian mansion in heavily wooded countryside 50 miles south of London. Like the house in the film, Wykehurst, empty for 40 years, was built by a wealthy industrialist a hundred years ago. And, according to Corbett, an area outside, leading up to the front door, is haunted by the ghost of an elderly gentleman in a frock coat. 'Who or what he is I do not know,' says Corbett, 'but I see him walking agitatedly up to the door and then vanishing.'

The ghost's area of operation seems to be confined to a 'lane' about 15 yards long and two yards wide, Corbett calculates. Inside this lane there is an icy-cold atmosphere, which stops right outside the front door. Corbett found no trace of any 'chill' on the other side of the threshold, which suggested to him that 'something happened to the old gentleman on the doorstep, and that he never got inside the house.'

'I do not get the impression that he came to a violent end,' Corbett states. 'But I do get this feeling of tremendous agitation, as if what he was doing was a matter of life or death, that, perhaps, he was trying to warn somebody, or prevent something happening.'

In nearby villages stories still persist that around the end of the last century a skeleton was found in the basement of the house, although local police records show no evidence of this. One explanation is that the discovery of the skeleton was hushed up at the time.

Production notes