



The Elephant Man

Director: David Lynch

Production Company: Brooksfilms

Executive Producer: Stuart Cornfeld

Producer: Jonathan Sanger

In Charge of Production: Terence A. Clegg

Production Accountant: John Trehy

Location Manager: Graham Ford

Production Secretary: Loretta Ordewer

Assistant Director: Anthony Waye

2nd Assistant Director: Gerry Gavigan

Continuity: Ceri Evans

Casting: Maggie Cartier

Screenplay: Christopher De Vore, Eric Bergren,

David Lynch

Based on the book *The Elephant Man and Other*

Reminiscences by: Sir Frederick Treves

Based in part on the book *The Elephant Man: A*

Study in Human Dignity by: Ashley Montagu

Director of Photography: Freddie Francis

Camera Operator: Jeremy Dunkley

Gaffer: Roy Larner

Stills Photography: Frank Connor

Special Effects: Graham Longhurst

Editor: Anne V. Coates

Assistant Editor: Patrick Moore

Production Designer: Stuart Craig

Art Director: Bob Cartwright

Set Decorator: Hugh Scaife

Prop Master: Terry Wells

Costume Designer: Patricia Norris

Wardrobe Supervisor: Tiny Nicholls

Make-up Supervisor: Wally Schneiderman

Elephant Man Make-up Designed/ Created by:

Christopher Tucker

Elephant Man Make-up Applied by:

Wally Schneiderman

Hairdressers: Stephanie Kaye, Paula Gillespie

Music/Music Conductor: John Morris

Music Performed by:

The National Philharmonic Orchestra

Orchestrations: Jack Hayes

Sound Design: Alan Splet, David Lynch

Sound Mixer: Robin Gregory

Dolby Engineer: John Iles

Dubbing Mixer: Doug Turner

Sound Editor: Peter Horrocks

Special Sound Effects: Alan Splet

Research: Randy Auerbach

Studios: Shepperton Studios, Lee Studios *

Cast:

Anthony Hopkins (*Frederick Treves*)

John Hurt (*John Merrick*)

Anne Bancroft (*Mrs Madge Kendal*)

John Gielgud (*Carr Gomm*)

Wendy Hiller (*Mothershead*)

Freddie Jones (*Bytes*)

Michael Elphick (*night porter*)

Hannah Gordon (*Mrs Treves*)

Helen Ryan (*Princess Alex*)

John Standing (*Fox*)

Dexter Fletcher (*Bytes's boy*)

Lesley Dunlop (*Nora*)

Phoebe Nicholls (*Merrick's mother*)

Pat Gorman (*fairground bobby*)

Claire Davenport (*fat lady*)

Orla Pederson (*skeleton woman*)

Patsy Smart (*distraught woman*)

Frederick Treves (*alderman*)

Stromboli (*fire eater*)

Richard Hunter (*Hodges*)

James Cormack (*Pierce*)

Robert Bush (*messenger*)

David Lynch: The Dreamer

The Elephant Man

The screening on Tuesday 27 January will include a Q&A with actor Dexter Fletcher

David Lynch on 'The Elephant Man'

*Can you talk a little about how *The Elephant Man* arose? Because that must be one of the most inspired pieces, I think, of creative casting of a director to a project that we've seen in quite a while. The film was a project originally with Mel Brooks's company, wasn't it?*

No, it wasn't... It ended up with Brooksfilms, but it started off with two writers, Christopher DeVore and Eric Bergren, who loved the idea and the story of the Elephant Man, and wrote a screenplay. Jonathan Sanger, who later became the producer of the film, optioned that screenplay. And Stuart Cornfeld, who was working for Mel Brooks, read the screenplay, knew Jonathan, and Stuart told me about *The Elephant Man*. I read the screenplay and I loved it. And Stuart and Jonathan and I went to various studios – all the studios – and tried to get them interested.

And what was their response?

It was turned down everywhere we went. They said, 'No one wants to see a film about a hideously deformed human being,' and that's what they said. Meanwhile, Mel Brooks had read the script. It had been in his office and had somehow gotten home, and he and Anne Bancroft both read it, and Mel fell in love with it, and said he'd like very much to have it be his company's first picture. And he said, 'We're definitely going to need Chris and Eric, and we're going to need Jonathan, he's optioned in the script, and Stuart can be involved, but who's this guy, David Lynch?' And Jonathan said, 'Well, you're going to have to see *Eraserhead*.' And I said, 'This is the end of the road for me.' And so Mel went into the screening room with Jonathan and Stuart and I stayed out pacing back and forth.

The doors came bursting open and Mel came hurtling toward me and wrapped his arms around me and said, 'I love you. You're a mad man. You can do the job.' So fate steps in again.

That was shot in London. Why was that? Why not shoot it in the States?

Well, it's a Victorian picture. And London, the mood – it would never have happened, it would never have been the same. When I came here, especially at the Eastern Hospital in Hackney – it's Hackney, right? As soon as I walked into that hospital, I knew in my heart, or I felt I knew, Victorian England, the atmosphere was still there. And the atmosphere is so much here, it's incredible. So it had to be here.

David Lynch interviewed by Chris Auty at the National Film Theatre, 12 December 1984

Robert Eggers on 'The Elephant Man'

Lynch's profoundly inimitable and groundbreaking canon is packed with inspirational touchstones that I often revisit and study, from *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* to *Lost Highway* to *Inland Empire*. But *The Elephant Man* is the David Lynch film I've seen the most, and is certainly among my most rewatched movies. Arguably, though, it is the least Lynchian of his films, both in

Roy Evans (*cabman*)
Joan Rhodes (*cook*)
Nula Conwell (*Kathleen, the nurse*)
Tony London (*young porter*)
Alfie Curtis (*milkman*)
Bernadette Milnes (*1st fighting woman*)
Brenda Kempner (*2nd fighting woman*)
Carol Harrison (*tart*)
Hugh Manning (*broadneck*)
Dennis Burgess (*1st committee man*)
Fanny Carby (*Mrs Kendal's dresser*)
Morgan Sheppard (*man in pub*)
Kathleen Byron (*Lady Waddington*)
Gerald Case (*Lord Waddington*)
David Ryall (*man with whores*)
Deirdre Costello (*1st whore*)
Pauline Quirke (*2nd whore*)
Kenny Baker (*plumed dwarf*)
Chris Greener (*giant*)
Marcus Powell, Gilda Cohen (*midgets*)
Lisa Scoble, Teri Scoble (*Siamese twins*)
Eiji Kusahara (*Japanese bleeder*)
Robert Day (*Little Jim*)
Patricia Hodge (*screaming mum*)
Tommy Wright (*1st bobby*)
Peter Davidson (*2nd bobby*)
John Rapley (*king in panto*)
Hugh Spight (*puss in panto*)
Teresa Codling (*princess in panto*)
Marion Betzold (*principal boy*)
Caroline Haigh, Florenzio Morgado (*trees*)
Victor Kravchenko (*lion/coachman*)
Beryl Hicks (*fairy*)
Michele Amas, Lucie Alford, Penny Wright, Janie Kells (*horses*)
Lydia Lisle (*Merrick's mother*)
USA 1980
123 mins
Digital 4K

* Uncredited

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its traditional cinematic storytelling and its unique setting. Lynch's imaginary playground flourishes in mid-century Americana. But Victorian London is a world that more easily sparks my imagination and where I feel more at home, which is why I gravitate to this film. And yet, I wonder how much Lynch's dark and sooty interpretation of this world has influenced my own infatuation. I saw some of the beginning scenes on TV when I was quite young, maybe seven years old, at my grandfather's house. I don't remember why I didn't have the chance to finish the movie, but I couldn't shake the images of John Hurt and make-up designer Christopher Tucker's interpretation of Joseph Merrick – nor the wild-eyed Freddie Jones with his unsettling tremors saying 'LIFE ... [insanely long pause]... is full of surprises' – nor Anthony Hopkins' single tear when first seeing Merrick. Then, around twelve or thirteen years old, it was on TV again, and I saw the whole thing. I was dumbfounded, and weeping. It was years before I discovered *Eraserhead* and got to know who David Lynch was as a filmmaker – and even without that context *The Elephant Man* was simply, pound for pound, one of the most powerful films I had ever seen. It still is.

Lynch is synonymous with storytelling that defies conventional dramaturgy. But like Picasso's early naturalistic academic works, *The Elephant Man* showcases that it takes a master of convention to have the unique vision and the technical ability to defy and reinvent it. Here he uses his distinctive talent to fully transport the audience to another time and place using the resources and expertise of traditional British filmmakers – but he pushes it further in his collaboration. The atmosphere and world-building is so dense. From the pounding and throbbing horror soundscapes of industrial London, to the dream prologue with Merrick's mother's scream that can never be forgotten, to production designer Stuart Craig's astonishing detail of the Victorian 'freak show' – and all this captured with Freddie Francis's masterful photography on black-and-white stock (already archaic in 1980). While the tone and atmosphere is unmistakably Lynchian, it is the elegance of the staging and camera work, the pace, the exquisite naturalistic performances and the emotional thrust of the storytelling that makes the film such an enduring classic – not just to cinephiles – but to everyone who sees it. As John Hurt said in a 2001 documentary about the film, 'If you can get to the end of *The Elephant Man* without being moved, I don't think you'd be someone I'd want to know.' It is a masterpiece by the master.

Sight and Sound, March 2025