



Silent Cinema

The German Retreat and Battle of Arras

+ intro by Dr Toby Haggith of Imperial War Museums

Programme

Stand by the Men Who Stood by You

Series: Kincartoons

Sponsor: National War Savings Committee

Production Company: Kinsella and Morgan

Directors: E.P. Kinsella and Horace Morgan

UK 1917

IWM 542

5 mins

The Secret

Series: Film Tags

Sponsor: Ministry of Information

Cast:

Henry Edwards

Chrissie White

UK 1918

IWM 549

2 mins

The German Retreat and Battle of Arras

Sponsor: War Office Cinematograph Committee

Production Company: Topical Film Company

Distributor: William Frederick Jury

Military Director of Kinematograph Operations:

Captain J.C. Fauthorpe

Cameramen: Geoffrey Herbert Malins, Harry

Charles Raymond, John Benjamin McDowell,

Herbert Frederick Baldwin

Trade show: 6 June 1917

Premiere: 25 June 1917

Restored by Imperial War Museums (IWM)

2019-2025

Scanning of IWM masters: R3store Studios

Supply and scanning of Portuguese copy:

Cinematca Portuguesa (Cineric)

Missing titles supplied by: National Archives and

Records Administration (NARA), and Library of

Congress

Digital Restoration:

Università degli Studi di Udine (DIUM)

Restorers: Serena Bellotti, Petra Mariuzzi, Cosetta

Saba, Gianandrea Sasso, Simone Venturini, Irene

Fabbro, Fiammetta Rodella, Tamara Sandrin

Music: Laura Rossi

Conductor: John Gibbons

Music Performed by:

The Chamber Orchestra of London

Musicians: Peter Robertston, Hugh Wilkinson,

Huw Watkins, Thomas Gould, Mark Derudder,

Helene Clement, Tim Hugh, Paul Kimber

Choir: Guildhall Session Singers

Artistic Director: Mike Roberts

Musical Director: Clare Wheeler

Soprano Solo: Alex Moss

Alto Solo: Scarlet Halton

Choir: Alex Moss, Anni Delger, Clare Wheeler,

Nicole Petrus-Barracks, Scarlet Halton, Owen

Butcher, Barnaby Wynter, Thomas Jesty, Charles

Broad, Aidan May, Joe Le

Recording studio: Master Chord Studio

Engineer: Ronan Phelan

Editor and Mixer: Steve Parr

The composing and recording of the music were

made possible by the generous support of

The David Lean Foundation

IWM Staff who worked on the restoration:

Mike Bailey, Natalia Bianchi, Abbie Brennan,

The German Retreat and Battle of Arras records the British Army's big Easter offensive on the Western Front during the First World War. The third in a trilogy of official feature-length films about the Army's campaigns in France and Belgium – *Battle of the Somme* (1916) and *Battle of the Ancre and Advance of the Tanks* (1917) – *Battle of Arras* is the least known of the series, but beautiful and visually more varied, as demonstrated in this new digital restoration, the fruit of a collaboration between IWM and the University of Udine.

Cameramen and production

Battle of Arras was filmed by four newsreel cameramen, Geoffrey Malins, Harry Raymond, John McDowell and Herbert Baldwin. Malins and McDowell had been the cameramen for the Somme campaign films. The cameramen were given an Army uniform to wear, housed and fed by the Army and transported around the battle zones in an Army car. They were not free to film where they wished, as they were usually 'conducted' by Captain J.C. Fauthorpe, an officer from Military Intelligence and the Military Director Kinematograph Operations, and they depended on the Army for access to the battlefields and information about what was happening and the subjects they could film.

The film was sponsored by the War Office Cinema Committee, and produced by the Topical Film Company, an organisation made up of leading newsreel and factual filmmakers. There are no records about the production of the film, and other than the cameramen we do not know who made it. So it is assumed that the editing and titling was done in the same way as for *Somme* and *Ancre*: the cameramen bringing back the exposed footage and their notes of what they shot to London, where the film was assembled by an unnamed producer, assisted by one or more of the cameramen, with Captain Fauthorpe writing all the titles. Once the footage had been edited, a rough cut was screened to War Office officials and then sent to Army General Headquarters in France for more scrutiny and censorship.

Plot and analysis

On first impressions, *Battle of Arras* follows the Somme campaign films – it has the same duration, and a similar thematic structure, but closer inspection shows that it differs in important respects. Instead of the first reel concentrating on the preparations for the infantry offensive, most of the screentime of Part One is devoted to 'The German Retreat' – scenes of the French territory vandalised by the Germans as they withdrew to the Hindenburg line. Thereafter the film only lightly follows the pattern of *Somme* and *Ancre*; what's most striking is that there is no mid-film climax of British soldiers going 'over the top' at the start of Part Three. This is replaced by two gripping trench raids, the camera following the men as they pop up, then crouch-run among clouds of smoke to the enemy trenches. The raiders straggle back later, grim-faced and breathing hard, now oblivious to the camera. The intertitles relate that the raids brought back prisoners and valuable information; documents record that the South Africans and Cameroonians had many casualties, including 14 dead.

Joanne Burden, David Finch, Toby Haggith, Andy Higgins, Matthew Lee, Carrie Marks, Elena Nepoti, Lizzie Rowberry, David Walsh, Clare Watson, Margaret Welller
UK 1917
IWM 113
Original runtime: 74 mins
Restored runtime: 77 mins

Baghdad, Babylon and Baalbec
(Advance of the Crusaders into Mesopotamia)
Production Company: Jury's Imperial Pictures
Producer: William F. Jury
Camera: Ariel L. Vargas
Camera: Harold Jeapes
1920
IWM 81
15 mins

Milnrow and Newhey Roll of Honour
Production Company/Sponsor:
Empire Picture Palace, Milnrow (Rochdale)
Producer: Ernest Greenwood
1918
MGH 2619
7 mins

With live piano accompaniment by John Sweeney (shorts only)

New digital restoration, by the Imperial War Museums and the University of Udine. Score supported by the David Lean Foundation.

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There are also fewer shots in the trenches. Instead, there is a lot of movement by troops and even cavalry and horse-drawn cannons above ground, reflecting the successes of the British offensive at the start of the Battle. Another important difference is that *Battle of Arras* gives far less time to the wounded and their treatment at the battlefield dressing stations that was such a mournful characteristic of the two previous films. However, there is a shot of the German dead (in Part Three).

Battle of Arras has the familiar tropes of the genre, but they are somehow more intense: the camera mingles more closely with the stoic, ever-cheerful Tommies and the familiar panning long-shots show the landscape to be more haunting, more ravaged by war. A special feature of *Arras* are the hand-coloured sections and red intertitles, created to add mood, highlight the explosions, and add a realistic naturalism to some shots – blue for the river and sky, brown for the soil.

Reception

Battle of Arras was well-received – comparing it with *Somme* and *Ancre*, reviewers were impressed with the camerawork, which they felt was improving and becoming more dynamic and closer to the action. All the press accounts remarked on the variety of topics covered in the film and, especially, the scenes of destruction created by the German scorched earth policy, and the general impact of warfare on the landscape. As ever, there was admiration for the bravery, humour and fortitude of the infantrymen.

The restoration and the music

The digital restoration was based on IWM masters and a Portuguese language nitrate print, which was in scene order the same and had the coloured sections missing from IWM versions. The restoration was conducted at the University of Udine by students taught by Simone Venturini and Gianandrea Sasso. Overall guidance was given at regular meetings with IWM's film specialists.

A feature of IWM's restorations of *Somme* and *Ancre* has been the creation of accompanying music, with the 1916/17 medley scores revived and new original music composed by Laura Rossi. Rossi also won the commission for *Battle of Arras*, and decided to compose a choral work, selecting poems and other writings (English, French and German), mainly by soldiers who were there. She also arranged the music for five songs; all strongly connected to the war. Rossi's work was inspired by the discovery that her Great Uncle Fred, who she knew as a child, had been a stretcher bearer serving in the Somme, Ancre and Arras battles. On preparatory visits to the battlefields, she was even able to retrace Fred's route as he had left diaries recording his experiences.

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