SILENT LAUGHTER 2025

10.00	IT'S THE OLD ARMY GAME (1926)
11.30	REDISCOVERIES & RESTORATIONS
13.00	*LUNCH*
14.00	FEMALE FUN
15.45	WHY BE GOOD? (1929)
17.30	FOCUS ON... KEYSTONE
19.00	*DINNER*
20.00	THE SMALL BACHELOR (1927)

MUSICIANS: Neil Brand, Costas Fotopoulos, Cyrus Gabrysch, Colin Sell & Ashley Valentine.

Programme curated by Dave Glass, Glenn Mitchell & Matthew Ross

With thanks to the Kennington Bioscope Team and to our many contributors: Christopher Bird, Joseph Blough, Serge Bromberg, Joshua Cattermole, Bryony Dixon, Michelle Facey, Tony Fletcher, Bob Geoghegan, John Sweeney, Amran Vance. Thanks also to David Lavelli, and of course to our projectionist Phil Clark and The Cinema Museum's team of volunteers.

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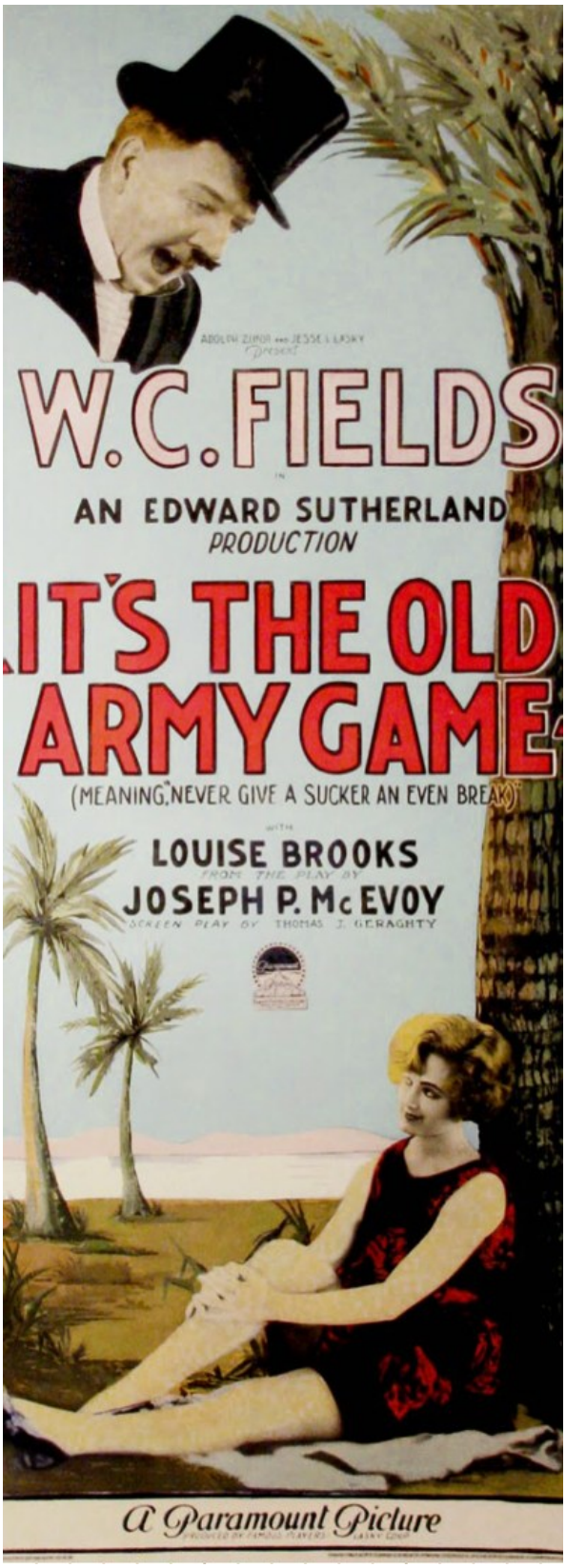
THE CINEMA MUSEUM

IT'S THE OLD ARMY GAME (USA, 1926)

Paramount. Released 24th May, 1926. Presented by Adolph Zukor and Jesse L. Lasky. Associate Producer: William Le Baron. Produced and directed by Edward Sutherland. Second assistant (uncredited) Joseph Pasternak. Story: Joseph P. McEvoy, based on his Broadway play The Comic Supplement. Screenplay/Supervising Editor: Tom J. Geraghty. Photography: Alvin Wyckoff. Titles: Ralph Spence.

CAST: W.C. Fields (Elmer Prettywillie), Louise Brooks (Marilyn Sheridan), Blanche Ring (Tessie Overholt, railroad station agent),William Gaxton (George Parker), Mary Foy (Sarah Pancoast, Elmer's sister), Mickey Bennett (Elmer's nephew), Elise Cavanna (store customer), Josephine Dunn (society bather), Jack Luden (society bather), George Currie (artist), John Merton (fireman).



For a comedian so closely associated with the distinctive vocal manner of his talkie appearances, W.C. Fields had a surprisingly prolific career in silent films. His original act was as a mute comic juggler, in which guise he travelled the world extensively as a top-of-the-bill attraction. His act became verbal for the first time in the Ziegfeld *Follies* of 1915, which incorporated a now-missing short film of Fields with fellow-comic Ed Wynn. It was later the same year that the American end of Gaumont, based in New York, starred Fields in two `Casino Star Comedies' for release by Mutual. The first of these one-reelers starring Broadway attractions, *Pool Sharks*, is widely available today and is a rather tricked-up version of Fields' poolroom routine; the second, *His Lordship's Dilemma*, reportedly survives in a lone, inaccessible copy in a European archive but is known to have been based on his golfing act.

Fields continued in the *Follies* until a defection to George White's *Scandals* and, from 1923, a hugely successful Broadway play called *Poppy*. Aside from a brief contribution to the 1924 Marion Davies vehicle *Janice Meredith*, Fields was not seen again by the movie-going public until 1925, when D.W. Griffith filmed *Poppy* – retitled *Sally of the Sawdust* - for United Artists. Griffith was leaving UA for Paramount, who allowed use of their facilities to speed Griffith's move. The leading lady was Carol Dempster – Griffith's protégée and lover – with whom Fields co-starred in a second Griffith film, *That Royle Girl*, released by Paramount at the end of 1925. The film is believed lost, but actuality footage has survived of Fields clowning at the première. Fields had meanwhile returned to Ziegfeld, in a musical comedy written by Joseph P. McEvoy called *The Comic Supplement*, essentially a series of sketches inspired by the Sunday comics pages in American newspapers. After it closed, elements of the show were reworked into the 1925 version of the *Follies*, again with Fields.

It was not long before producer William Le Baron – who as Director-General of Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions had cast Fields in *Janice Meredith* and continued to foster his film career into the 1930s – signed the comedian to a five-year contract at Paramount, making three pictures a year for a weekly salary of $4,000. Unlike previous offers from Paramount and Hal Roach, the contract permitted Fields to continue to make appearances on stage; because the productions were based at Paramount's studios at Astoria, Long Island, it also allowed him to remain mostly in New York. Although principal filming took place in Long Island and Manhattan, some scenes for *It's the Old Army Game,* the first production under this arrangement, were taken on location in Ocala, Florida, and at the nearby Palm Beach summer home of banker Edward Stotesbury.

McEvoy's original script, which incorporated existing Fields sketches, was essentially plotless but the screenplay by Tom J. Geraghty, who served also as supervising editor, introduced a parody element based on the then-current Florida land boom. This was also the target of the Marx Brothers' then-current Broadway play, *The Cocoanuts*, which had opened several months earlier. Trivia note: stage actress Blanche Ring, seen here in one of her few movie appearances, was the aunt of producer/director A. Edward Sutherland. Her brother, Cyril Ring, is in the 1929 film version of *Cocoanuts*.

Eddie Sutherland, as he was frequently known, was originally from London. He had previously been assistant director to Charlie Chaplin, with whom he first worked while an actor at Keystone. *It's the Old Army Game* was the beginning of an association with Fields that would last into the 1940s. Fields and his leading lady, Louise Brooks (who had previously been associated with Chaplin in, to put it discreetly, quite a different way!) had met in the 1925 *Follies* and developed a genuine friendship, within which Fields adopted a paternal attitude towards the young newcomer. More than half a century later, Brooks was to write warmly of Fields in her memoir *Lulu in Hollywood*. Her affection for Fields far outlived anything she may have felt for Eddie Sutherland, whom she married shortly after the release of *It's the Old Army Game* but swiftly divorced after becoming involved with another man. Louise Brooks was making this kind of film prior to becoming a `renegade' in *avant-garde* pictures in Germany, or else participating in non-mainstream American projects such as *Beggars of Life* (screened at KB in January 2025). Rather closer to *Old Army Game* territory was her rôle in Howard Hawks' light comedy *A Girl in Every Port* (1928).

Poppy and *It's the Old Army Game* were to provide the two main templates for much of Fields's future work: fairground huckster and harassed family man. *It's the Old Army Game*, from the latter category, is perhaps the most representative of W.C. Fields' feature-length silent comedies. As previously noted, some of the material derives from his earlier stage sketches and would be used again on radio and in his sound shorts for Mack Sennett, particularly *The Pharmacist* (1933). Another element to resurface in these two-reelers was Elise Cavanna, the lanky actress whose manic driving opens *It's the Old Army Game*.

Fields remade some of his silents as talkies; in 1934, *So's Your Old Man* (1926) became *You're Telling Me*, while *It's the Old Army Game* formed the basis of *It's a Gift*. Elements of *Running Wild* (1927) resurfaced in *The Man On the Flying Trapeze* (1935). For many years, most of Fields's silents were not known to exist and when BBC2 screened *It's a Gift* on Friday 22nd March 1974, it was followed later that evening by an edition of the programme *Film Night* that included a rediscovered clip of a scene from *It's the Old Army Game*, repeated in *It's a Gift*, in which Fields attempts to sleep outside on the porch. The complete film became available to view relatively soon after. Another scene remade in *It's a Gift* is that where the family picnic takes place outside a private mansion. In each case the basic gags are retained but the later performances, aided in any case by sound effects and Fields' vocal delivery, are simplified and, it must be admitted, ultimately more effective. That said, Fields is well worth seeing even in silents and although more of them have resurfaced over the years, one has cause to regret the continued absence of five of his features – the aforementioned *That Royle Girl*, *The Potters*, *Two Flaming Youths*, the 1928 remake of *Tillie's Punctured Romance* and *Fools For Luck* – which, sadly, is all too typical of the preservation status of silent cinema.

Glenn Mitchell

REDISCOVERIES & RESTORATIONS

PIMPLE'S LADY GODIVA (UK, 1917)

Piccadilly Film Productions. Distributed by The Walturdaw Company, Limited. June 11, 1917. 22' incomplete.
Directed and Scenario by Fred Evans and Joe Evans. Cast: Fred Evans (Pimple - Lady Godiva), Joe Evans (Lady Godiva's old man – Cecil Walrus).

In 1915, British moviegoers voted Fred Evans second only to Charles Chaplin as their favourite film comedian. Appearing as the roguish and anarchic "Pimple," Fred made 200 silent movies between 1910 and 1922, running amok in frantic chases and sending-up current events and fashions. With a rich family heritage in pantomime and music hall, Evans introduced a satirical approach to filmmaking, frequently lampooning the recently introduced feature films. Pimple's burlesques deflated the seriousness of such productions, providing subversive support for audiences adjusting to the new form. But continual mockery of themes, acting styles and film techniques did not endear him to all. Changing public tastes and industry disapproval eventually resulted in an end to Evans' screen appearances and a return to the stage.
(Taken from the introduction to *Pimple's Progress: Fred Evans, Britain's First Film Comedy Star* by Barry Anthony).

Lady Godiva (died between 1066 and 1086), in Old England *Godgifu*, was a late Anglo-Saxon noblewoman. She is mainly remembered for a legend dating back to at least the 13th century, in which she rode naked – covered only by her long hair – through the streets of Coventry to gain a remission of the oppressive taxation that her husband, Leofric, imposed on his tenants. The name "Peeping Tom" for a voyeur originates from later versions of this legend, in which a man named Thomas watched her ride and was struck blind or dead.
This screening is the premiere of a new restoration of this film from an incomplete nitrate print discovered by the late film historian David Redfern.

Bob Geoghegan

PIMPLE DOES THE TURKEY TROT (UK, 1912)

EcKo production, distributed by Cosmopolitan Films. Released October 1912. Split-reel.
Directed by W.P. Kellino Cast: Fred Evans (Pimple)

Rare *Pimples* seem to be like buses… missing for ages, and then two come along. Just after we'd confirmed the screening of *Pimple's Lady Godiva,* a very rare print of *Pimple Does The Turkey Trot* turned out to be right here, in The Cinema Museum's collection! This is a split-reel film from 1912, in which Pimple guys a current dance trend: the perfect forum for Fred Evans to show off his music hall physicality.

WAIT AND SEE (UK, 1910)

Gaumont. Released June 1910.

This film in the collection of Joshua Cattermole may be a version of *Wait and See* (1910), about a man who thinks he is Napoleon Bonaparte.

THE STONE AGE (USA, 1922)

Produced by Hal Roach. Distributed by Pathé. Released Aug 6, 1922. One reel.
Directed by Charley Chase. Cast: Snub Pollard, Marie Mosquini, Noah Young.

Stone Age comedies were somewhat in vogue during the silent era. Among the Neolithic funnies produced were Chaplin's *His Prehistoric Past,* Keaton's *Three Ages* and the Laurel & Hardy pre-team short *Flying Elephants.* It wasn't just the big names who found the punchlines in pre-history, and *The Stone Age* features that great silent comedy 'second banana', Snub Pollard. Since graduating from playing sidekick to Harold Lloyd, the little Australian with the drooping moustache had appeared in a string of breathlessly inventive and irreverent comedies for Hal Roach. The word 'silly' is often used in a negative sense when describing humour, but in Pollard's comedies, silliness is a joy. For this sort of comedy to work, it has to be creative, and wholly committed to following absurd premises to their most illogical conclusions, or rather, conclusions that develop a daft logic all of their own. His films – aided by great gagmen and directors like Charley Chase – revel in some of the most absurd situations and visual humour imaginable, with poor Snub the bewildered simp at the centre of the gag maelstrom. *The Stone Age* is a great example, and affords plenty of mileage to delightfully silly anachronistic gags. A contemporary reviewer from *Film Daily* was impressed: "*Here is one of the very best Hal Roach has done. Snub Pollard plays a caveman role, and Marie Mosquini takes the part of his wife. No explanations are needed!*"

This screening is a glimpse of a work in progress, a rough scan currently being restored by Dave Glass for a Snub Pollard Blu-Ray project due to land next year.

BIG BUSINESS (USA, 1929)

Hal Roach/MGM. Released April 20, 1929.
Directed by James W. Horne. Starring Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy, with James Finlayson, Lyle Tayo, Tiny Sandford.

Laurel & Hardy's *Big Business* is widely regarded as one of the all-time classic silent comedies. And rightly so; this battle royal between two Christmas tree salesmen and reluctant customer James Finlayson (who else?) is perhaps the apotheosis of their methodical, human approach to slapstick destruction. So, what's such a well-known film doing in a programme all about discovering the obscure? Well, a new restoration by Serge Bromberg presents a new side to this old favourite. Here is *Big Business* as you've never seen it before…

Matthew Ross

FEMALE FUN

A showcase for three wonderful comic performers who broke through the slapstick patriarchy.

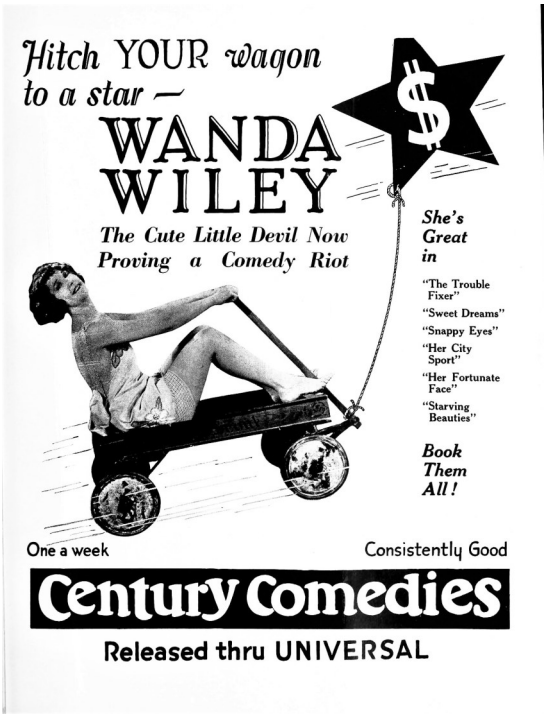
MABEL NORMAND (1892 – 1930)

Comedian, director, writer: Mabel Normand was a true trailblazer for women in screen comedy. History's portrayal of her – not least in the musical *Mack & Mabel* – has her forever entwined with producer Mack Sennett. But, while Sennett may have helped provide the platform for her success at his Keystone Studios, the guiding light of Mabel's career was her own comedic skill. She was soon writing and directing in her own comedies, pretty much unique for a female performer at the time. A versatile performer, she handled wild barnyard slapstick, spoofs of melodramas and tender romantic comedies with equal aplomb. Normand was on hand at Keystone for the very first feature length comedy, *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (1914), and appeared memorably with Roscoe Arbuckle in several charming films, including the beautiful *Fatty and Mabel Adrift.*

After a split – personal and professional – from Sennett in 1916, Normand moved into feature length comedy dramas for Goldwyn. These are elusive, but surviving examples like *The Floor Below* (screened at Silent Laughter in 2023), show that Mabel could carry the longer length, and the added dramatic elements, with ease. She would also return to Sennett for three more features: *Mickey* (1918), *Molly O'* (1921) and *The Extra Girl* (1923). The latter features the wonderful scene of Mabel unknowingly leading a lion through the middle of a film studio, as all the men around her scatter. It's a fitting image for her ebullient screen persona.

Personal troubles dogged Mabel in the 1920s; a narcotics addiction and (innocent) involvement in several scandals wounded her career, and illness finished it off for good. But before her last curtain call, she did one last victory lap in a handful of short films for Hal Roach. By all accounts, Mabel's illness was now getting the better of her, but she still shines in the five films. She was also surrounded by top talent: Stan Laurel was among the writers, and there was on-screen support from the likes of Max Davidson, James Finlayson, Oliver Hardy and Creighton Hale. Today we're screening 1927's *Anything Once,* among the most rarely seen of these shorts. A Cinderella tale typical of the series, it features some great sight gags and humorous barbs on the subject of vanity that are still topical. Look out for a fun slapstick sequence on a streetcar and James Finlayson in an inevitably doomed toupée.

Mabel's last film for Roach, *Should Men Walk Home?* showed her moving into a new direction, as she played a svelte cat burglar plotting a jewel robbery. But sadly, her illness now meant the end of her career. Mabel Normand died from Tuberculosis, horribly young, at the age of 37. Nevertheless, she achieved more in those years than many artists do in twice the time. While film history books acknowledge Normand's importance and influence to comedy, and to women filmmakers in general, it's surely time that a comprehensive collection of her work is restored and made available.



WANDA WILEY (1901 - 1987)

Wanda Wiley is one of the most obscure female comedians. Sadly, about 90% of her short comedies are now missing, but those that remain reveal a very likeable performer who gets stuck into some terrific physical and visual comedy. Her comic equipment included long limbs that sprawled in different directions as she ran, and a wide-eyed, startled look as action swirled around her. Game for anything, she engaged in dangerous stunts and slapstick with vigour, usually without a double.

Wiley's talent at physical comedy is particularly remarkable considering that she did not come from a stage background and was a relative newcomer to films. Originally training to be a dentist, a chance encounter with a film director led to her appearing in some westerns, and then in Universal's boxing serial, *The Leather Pushers*. An incident happened on set that led to her comedy career, as recalled in a *Movie Monthly* profile of 1925: "*She was given a boxing scene in which she had to suffer a prompt and*

inglorious knockout. Wanda took her tap on the chin, but in falling added some funny business which set everyone to laughing".

Her comedy talent unlocked, Wiley was soon appearing in two-reelers for Century. The titles of the shorts leave no doubt about their comedic style: *A Thrilling Romance; Flying Wheels; Speedy Marriage; Just in Time…* These were fast-paced comedies, often featuring the heroine in a race to meet some kind of deadline. As one exhibitor put it, "*When Wanda plays, you can always expect some speedy entertainment"!* Action and stunting were the order of the day for the Wiley films, and she did the majority of her stunts herself.

Wiley made two series of these starring shorts before Century used her, more blandly, in a series of *What Happened to Jane?* comedies. Unfortunately, her roles became more subordinate to inferior male co-stars, soon degenerating into thankless 'pretty girlfriend' roles; by 1928, her career was over. Here's hoping more of her films turn up. They're fresh, funny and a great reminder that women could do stunts and slapstick just as well as men.

Today we're showing *A Thrilling Romance,* directed by Jess Robbins and released in 1926. Thanks to Joseph Blough for supplying the print.

MARION BYRON (1911 – 1985)

Marion Byron is best remembered today for her parts in two classic silent comedies: Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill, Jr,* and the marvellous Hal Roach short *A Pair of Tights,* in which she stars with Anita Garvin and Edgar Kennedy. In both, her sparkling comedic skill is a major contributor to the films' success.

Marion was born Miriam Bilenkin in Dayton, Ohio. A part in an amateur production gave her the acting bug, and she soon landed parts in more prestigious stage shows, beginning with *The Patsy.* Around this time, she adopted her stage name, and also received another new moniker: her tiny size (just 4' 11" tall) led her to be nicknamed 'Peanuts'.

Although Miriam had declared herself uninterested in competing with the swarms of young women trying to break into Hollywood, opportunity soon came knocking. While appearing in *The Strawberry Blonde*, she was talent-spotted by someone from Buster Keaton's studios. Keaton was currently on the lookout for a leading lady to appear in his new film, *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* Who could refuse? For a sixteen-year-old screen novice, Byron's work in the film is remarkable, and she perfectly complements Buster's comic style.

After the film's release, Hal Roach came calling. He wanted to team Miriam with Anita Garvin as a sort of female Laurel and Hardy. The pair certainly made a good contrast, with the small, doll-faced Miriam a wonderful comic counterpoint to the statuesque, dignified Anita. However, the Roach writers took their brief a little too literally; the initial films are something of a missed opportunity, trying to shoehorn the girls into an ersatz L & H format rather than allowing them to stretch out and develop their own characters. However, the third, *A Pair of Tights,* got the balance right between slapstick and situation comedy, as Marion and Anita go on a disastrous double date that ends in an ice-cream throwing melée. Sadly, the partnership ended after this film, but Miriam did make one more great film before leaving Roach in 1929. *The Boy Friend* isn't as widely celebrated as *A Pair of Tights,* but it's another charming little film, melding visual humour with human comedy. Marion has some great moments, especially in the first half, and the film also benefits from turns by Edgar Kennedy, Fay Holderness and the terrific Jewish comedian Max Davidson.

When sound came in, Byron's stage training made her perfect for musicals. While many of her silent comedy colleagues struggled to adapt to the new "ALL TALKING! ALL SINGING! ALL DANCING!" idiom, Marion was in her element. She featured prominently in Warner Brothers' *Show of Shows*, *Broadway Babies* with Alice White, and *Golden Dawn.* However, after this promising start, her roles soon began to get smaller, and she had retired by 1936. Her retirement was a happy one, though; her marriage to scriptwriter Lou Breslow lasted half a century, until her death in 1985.

Matthew Ross

For full articles on Wanda Wiley and Marion Byron, see issues 13 and 15 of The Lost Laugh magazine. ***www.thelostlaugh.com***

WHY BE GOOD? (USA 1929)

Production: First National Pictures
Producer: John McCormick
Director: William A. Seiter
Story/Screenplay: Carey Wilson
Cinematography: Sidney Hickox
Editor: Terry O. Morse
Choreographer: Ernest Belcher
Production/Costume Design: Max Rée

Cast: Colleen Moore (Pert Kelly), Neil Hamilton (Winthrop Peabody Jr.), Bodil Rosing (Ma Kelly), John St. Polis (Pa Kelly), Edward Martindel (Winthrop Peabody Sr.), Louis Natheaux (Jimmy Alexander), Eddie Clayton (Tim), Lincoln Stedman (Jerry), Collette Merton (Julie), Dixie Carter (Susie)

Plot Synopsis:
Winthrop Peabody Jr. and his friends prepare to frolic into the night before he must begin work the following day at his father's department store. Before departing, Winthrop Peabody Sr. lectures his son about women and warns him to avoid the store's female employees. Pert Kelly, after winning a dance contest, is wooed by gentlemen of questionable character. Pert catches the eye of Peabody Jr., who drives her home and schedules a date for the following night. Because she was out late, Pert is tardy to work and must report to the personnel office, where she is surprised to find Peabody Jr. working. Peabody Sr. sees what has happened and fires Pert. Peabody Jr. explains to Pert that it was not he who had terminated her, and they schedule another date. Lavish gifts arrive for Pert to wear to the next date. Her father admonishes her about the lack of virtues of the modern man, and Peabody Sr. repeats his warning to his son. On the next date, Peabody Jr. has devised a test of Pert's virtue. When he tries to push her past her personal limits, she protests and passes his test. They are married that night and prove her virtue to Peabody Sr., who cannot now refute it.

In January 1929 First National announced its intention to release "Ten pictures with Vitaphone a star," between February and April, with the "same productions in silent form (going) to exhibitors between January and March." Colleen Moore vehicle *Why Be Good?* was one of these. Her husband, former press officer to Colleen, turned producer, John McCormick, was reluctant for his wife to enter the realm of talkies, and within a year of this production his overbearing control of her career would see the end of their seven-year marriage. But for now, in this transitional period for the movies, there was still no dialogue yet for this spirited 'cailín'. Instead the film featured sound effects and music, plus a theme song entitled "I'm Thirsty for Kisses - Hungry for Love" with words and music by Lou Davis and J. Fred Coots.

Colleen Moore (1899-1988) born Kathleen Morrison in Michigan of Irish and Scottish heritage, made a screen-test with DW Griffith at 16, thinking to be the next Gish of the screen, but found herself in Triangle films till they went bust and then when the same situation occurred at Selig she found herself in Westerns with Tom Mix. But her leading role in *Little Orphant Annie* (1918) saw her star start to rise. Continuously working in pictures, it was 1923's *Flaming Youth* which brought notable success and sensation, marrying Moore and the burgeoning flapper phenomenon forever in the minds of the public. Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald cited this as the only film that captured the sexual revolution of the Jazz Age, stating "I was the spark that lit up *Flaming Youth*, Colleen Moore was the torch." With her boyish 'Dutch bob' hairstyle now also associated with her, a look to which she returned later in life, and with the restoration of some of her lost films such as this one, Moore was fated always to be intertwined with the then new-found female freedom of flappers and their fast friends, a symbol of her sex's emancipation in the twentieth century. Earning $12,500 a week as a top box-office earner in 1927, she cannily invested her wealth, and subsequently following divorce from McCormick, making second and third marriages, both to stockbrokers, she also made wise investments seeing her in good stead for the remainder of her retirement from the movies following a few talkies in 1933/4, most notably with Spencer Tracy in *The Power and The Glory*. Moore did get to see a revival of some of her films in later life, including the restoration of *Twinkletoes* (1926), a print of which was discovered at the surprising location of the Beamish Open-Air Museum in County Durham. She also appears in interview for eight episodes of *Hollywood* (1980), Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's seminal series

chronicling the silent era in America.

Romantic lead Neil Hamilton (1899-1984) hailing from Massachusetts, turned from modelling to repertory theatre, becoming a picture-player in 1918 and gaining fame in 1923, like his co-star here, but under DW Griffith in *the White Rose*. Playing one of the brothers in *Beau Geste* (1926), which survives, he starred as Nick Carraway in the first film adaptation of Scott's *The Great Gatsby* (1926), which sadly is not extant. He worked on in films after the advent of the talkies, returning also occasionally to the stage, and appearing in three Jerry Lewis pictures. But to most of us today, Neil Hamilton is remembered and visually revived regularly in living colour through re-runs for his role as Commissioner Gordon in all 120 TV episodes of *Batman* produced between 1966-68, plus the feature film made in 1966 between close in production of the first and second of the three seasons. Yvonne Craig, who played Commissioner Gordon's daughter Barbara, said Hamilton "came every day to the set letter perfect in dialogue and never missed a beat—a consummate professional."

Director William A. Seiter (1890-1964), a New Yorker, he started out as a stuntman and bit-player for the Sennett studios in 1915, graduating to directing shorts by 1918, followed by features through the 1920's and onwards, with a deft touch for charming comedies, including the domestic delight of *Skinner's Dress Suit* (1926) starring his then wife Laura La Plante with Reginald Denny. Among the many stars directed by Seiter during his long career were Shirley Temple, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Irene Dunne, Henry Fonda, Margaret Sullavan, Barbara Stanwyck, Jack Haley, Deanna Durbin, Jean Arthur, John Wayne, The Marx Brothers, Fred MacMurray, Lucille Ball, and Rita Hayworth. But perhaps his best-remembered film is the eternal *Sons of The Desert* (1933), starring silent laughter sons Laurel and Hardy, along with another favourite of our festivals here, the cheeky Charley Chase. Seiter made five films with Colleen Moore from 1928-29, three of which remain lost. Being able to see *Why Be Good?* at all is very good stuff indeed!

Brickbats and Bouquets - YOU FANS ARE THE REAL CRITICS – *Photoplay* October 1929
The Younger Generation Rears Up!— The $5 Letter –
"I'm tired of all this talk about movie producers having the modern boys and girls all wrong. It's the bunk. If a producer actually did make a picture showing the modern generation as we really are, he'd be exiled from the country. I mean to say that the movies show the young people as they really and truly are, only they sugar-coat us slightly. We do drink, smoke and pet, and we do sneak home in the wee hours of the morning. Joan Crawford's pictures do not exaggerate us one bit. Her "*Dancing Daughters*" was true to life, and Colleen Moore's *"Why Be Good?"* was a perfect conception of modern youth. Shocking, yet true, I am only sixteen years old and I have never yet seen a moving picture which shows us moderns as bad as most of the younger crowd is. But we youngsters are not all bad, and under it all there's some good. The movies show this, and it's so. Accept it." *Elizabeth Norvell, Tuscola Illinois*

Michelle Facey

FOCUS ON KEYSTONE

Another in the series of programmes spotlighting specific studios, presented by Dave Glass and Glenn Mitchell. Last time, at our April 2025 weekend, the subject was Biograph, from which emerged the first studio to specialise in the making of comedies: Keystone.

Mack Sennett had begun as an actor at Biograph. As he later admitted, he learned the business of directing by constantly tagging along after D.W. Griffith and asking questions. Sennett established a regular unit within Biograph, making comedies with Mabel Normand – who had become Sennett's lover – and Fred Mace. The trio left Biograph together when Sennett obtained the necessary funds to establish the Keystone Film Company, the formation of which was announced on 12th August 1912. Its background is now the subject of myth, chiefly an often discredited account by which Adam Kessel and Charles O. Baumann, of the New York Motion Picture Company, agreed to finance Sennett's venture as an alternative to settling a gambling debt (a story given credence by Kessel and Baumann's background as bookmakers). Aside from Keystone, Kessel and Baumann's company operated three other studios, `Kay-Bee' (after their initials), Domino (producing dramas) and a unit specializing in westerns, `Broncho' (not to be confused with G.M. Anderson, the `Broncho Billy' cowboy star of Essanay). It was for a time standard practice to advertise the four studios' products - all released via Mutual - with examples from each depicted as playing cards, under the heading `four aces'. The original Keystone logo, inspired by that of the Pennsylvania Railroad, underwent swift alteration into something more reminiscent of what one might see on cans of baked beans. In all other respects, title design was based on that at Biograph. However strange its beginnings, Keystone, as the first dedicated comedy studio, was an important development in the industry.

The founding ensemble of Keystone was completed by the addition of former circus clown Ford Sterling. Production commenced at the former 101 Bison studio at Edendale, California, on 28th August 1912. The first release, on 28th September, was a split-reel combining *Cohen Collects a Debt* with Ford Sterling, plus Mabel Normand in a clinging swimsuit for *The Water Nymph*. Keystone's house style of eccentric characters, fast-paced intrigues and, usually, a climactic chase, took recognizable shape within the first twelve months. Contrary to myth, it was usual for some form of script to be prepared for Keystone films, albeit merely as a basis for on-set improvisation and, of course, subject to abandonment when the crew decided to take advantage of a real-life event such as a parade or even a fire. One of the earlier surviving titles, *A Grocery Clerk's Romance* (28th October 1912), is worth noting for the use of undercranking throughout the film, accelerating the motion even at the then-standard speed of sixteen frames per second. Generally, this device - if employed at all - would be reserved for specific moments where greater momentum was required, whereas undercranking the entire subject (to say nothing of some hyperactive performances!) might suggest an initial tendency to try too hard. Sennett later ascribed this to a Russian cameraman, supposedly a former photographer to the Tsar, who claimed to be saving money on film stock and who was promptly fired after Sennett, borrowing a Biograph screening room, wanted to show the results to Griffith; however, this continued too long into the early Keystones to give the story credence.

Keystone's rapid expansion made it the industry leader during 1913. A second unit was established early in the year, under the direction of Henry `Pathé' Lehrman and starring comedienne Betty Schade. Among the other Keystone directors were Charles Avery, George `Pop' Nichols (considered an industry veteran when aged 49!), Herman Raymaker and ex-Biograph actor Wilfred Lucas. Efficiency was boosted further by the arrival from Universal of business manager George Stout. Other 1913 recruits included Chester Conklin, Mack Swain and Roscoe `Fatty' Arbuckle, the latter of whom has been credited in one of the company's major hits of that year, *The Bangville Police* (released 24th April), which introduced the group of comical lawmen known later as the Keystone Cops. Fred Mace was the original chief, a rôle that would later be assumed by Sterling. Also joining them in 1913 was Charlie Murray, known later for the long-running `Cohens and Kellys' series of features. One of his best Keystones, and an excellent example of the cross-cutting farce at which Keystone had become adept, is *The Plumber*, directed by ex-Biograph player

Dell Henderson and released on 10th December 1914. Today's programme includes a work-in-progress restoration by Bob Geoghegan of Archive Film Agency, based mostly on a rare 35mm original nitrate print.

It was at the end of 1913 that Keystone saw the arrival of a promising newcomer, Charlie Chaplin, whose first films were released early the following year. By that time both Roscoe Arbuckle and Mabel Normand (who were frequent co-stars) were starting to direct their own comedies. Normand's second film in this capacity, *Won in a Closet*, was released on 22nd January 1914 and was considered lost until a print under the title *Won in a Cupboard* (as it was known in British territories) was discovered in New Zealand in 2010. Chaplin was to follow, after initial disagreements with his directors – Lehrman (who left with Sterling to form the rival `Sterling Comedies' in early 1914), Nichols and, during shooting of *Mabel at the Wheel*, Mabel Normand – with the result that Sennett took over supervision until allowing the comedian total control over his own work. One notable exception was the feature-length *Tillie's Punctured Romance* (14th November 1914), directed by Sennett and with Marie Dressler (star of the original Broadway version), Chaplin and Normand as the leads. Chaplin's work developed so swiftly that he was poached by Essanay, for a much higher salary, at the end of his twelve-month Keystone contract. His final film for the studio, *His Prehistoric Past* (released 7th December 1914), sees his half-brother, Syd Chaplin, contributing the final gag in the role of a cop. Charlie had recommended Syd as his replacement but Syd's films as `Gussle', a somewhat more reprehensible variant on his sibling's familiar character, proved less popular with both the public and at Keystone itself. His best work at the studio was when playing a quite different character in the ambitious four-reel comedy *A Submarine Pirate* (14th November 1915).

Increasingly visible in the Keystones of 1914 was Charles Parrott, who had previously been with Nestor and by 1915 was establishing himself at Keystone as a leading man and director. One of the films he directed that year*, A Hash House Fraud* (released 10th June), stars Louise Fazenda, who had recently left a rival studio, Joker, which was Universal's attempt to replicate Keystone's success. An even more direct competitor was Henry Lehrman, who after the failure of the Sterling comedies (Ford Sterling himself made a rapid return to Keystone in 1915) set up `L-KO', or `Lehrman Knock-Out' comedies. Keystone comedienne Alice Howell, with whom Parrott worked in 1914's *The Great Toe Mystery*, was among several to leave for L-KO. A number of Parrott's 1915 Keystones, including *Settled at the Seaside* (directed by Frank Griffin and released 29th March), see him working alongside a recent arrival at the studio, Australian actress Mae Busch. It is often said that Sennett's personal relationship with Mabel Normand came to an end when Mabel found Mack in a compromising position with Mae. Mabel Normand was a favourite among the Keystone comedians and some have found significance in the fact that Mae Busch and Charles Parrott - latterly known as Charley Chase - were never seen together on screen in their later years at Hal Roach. It is probably no coincidence that by 1916 Normand had moved from Edendale to Keystone's facility in Fort Lee, New Jersey, where Arbuckle had also become based.

Another significant change had been the formation in July 1915 of the Triangle Film Corporation by brothers Harry and Roy Aitken, who had split from the Mutual company that had been distributing Keystone's output. This new, ambitious concern brought together Sennett, Griffith and producer Thomas H. Ince with plans for high-profile movies and a chain of theatres. Initially, Sennett's Triangle films acquired greater polish, began to credit directors (among them future Keaton associate Eddie Cline) and, in a further attempt to add status, brought in a host of stage stars, notably William Collier, Sam Bernard, Raymond Hitchcock, the legendary vaudeville double-act Weber and Fields, Billy Walsh, as well as Eddie Foy, fabled sire of the `Seven Little Foys', whose tenure was remarkably brief. These talents were not in their natural environment at Keystone and better work was done on screen by more established film names, notably Arbuckle, Ben Turpin - who arrived in 1917 after previous work at Essanay and Vogue - and even Sennett himself, whose work as an actor at Keystone had gone from early leading roles to occasional bits as rustics and the like, as his energies turned more towards production. Sennett's later on-screen appearances tended to be as himself, notably in *The Hollywood Kid* (1924). In *My Valet*, directed by Sennett and released on 7th November 1915, he takes the title role in the story of a butler who impersonates his employer (Raymond Hitchcock) in order to help him escape an arranged marriage, neither of them aware that the intended bride and his preferred sweetheart are in fact the same woman (Mabel Normand). Perhaps the best late addition to the Keystone roster at Triangle was Gloria Swanson, a former Essanay player who had appeared in Chaplin's first film for them after having left Keystone. She actually had no taste for slapstick and was pleased to accept Cecil B. DeMille's offer of feature work at Paramount. Her best-remembered Keystone, *Teddy at the Throttle*, directed by Clarence Badger and released on 15th April 1917, sends up the theatrical melodrama cliché of the heroine chained to the railroad tracks (previously done at Keystone in the 1913 *Barney Oldfield's Race For a Life*).

Swanson's contract with Triangle meant she was only allowed to work elsewhere on a loan-out basis, something to which Triangle only agreed because it was in serious trouble. The company had rapidly become overextended and both Sennett and Ince departed after just under two years, with Sennett permanently having to relinquish rights to the Keystone name. As a result, in 1917 his studio became known as `Mack Sennett Comedies', initially releasing through Paramount. A number of Triangle `Keystones' were made post-Sennett before production ceased and the company was absorbed into – once again - Paramount. Much of today's received view of the Keystone output is based more on Sennett's later productions, which sometimes revived such motifs as the Cops in exaggerated form; the originals are, by contrast, due for reappraisal in their own right.

Glenn Mitchell

THE SMALL BACHELOR (USA, 1927)

Production: Universal.
Producer: Carl Laemmle
Director: William A. Seiter
Story/Screenplay: John B Clymber, Rex Taylor, Walter Anthony, based on the story by P.G. Wodehouse.
Cinematography: Arthur L Todd.
Released 6th November, 1927.

Cast: Barbara Kent (Molly Waddington), André Beranger (George Finch), Lucien Littlefield (Sigsbee H. Waddington), George Davis (Officer Garroway), Gertrude Astor, William Austin, Ned Sparks, Carmelita Geraghty.

P.G. Wodehouse spent more than half a century creating a peerless comic world of befuddled aristocrats, wily valets, feckless young men and draconian aunts. From *Blandings* to *Jeeves and Wooster,* his stories have proved rich fodder for screen and television adaptation. But, while our thoughts might initially jump to Fry and Laurie or to Ian Carmichael and Dennis Price in *The World of Wooster,* it's perhaps surprising to discover how far back the history of Wodehouse on screen goes. Right back to the silent era, in fact. While the witty dialogue and oh-so-English characters of the Wodehouse stories don't initially seem like obvious material for Hollywood silent cinema, there were actually quite a number of silent comedy films made interpreting his work.

In fact, while the collective memory remembers Wodehouse as a quintessentially English writer, he was seduced by the bright lights of New York early in his career, and spent the early 1910s working on both sides of the Atlantic. He was in the Big Apple when World War One broke out, and subsequently spent the rest of the conflict there. This soon presented new opportunities; P.G.'s previous experience as a librettist in English theatres, combined with his comic skill, made him the perfect candidate for working on Broadway shows. Initially contributing lyrics, he was soon working on scripts for new musicals, such as *Oh! Lady! Lady!!* and *Leave It To Jane.*

Meanwhile, the ever-expanding American film industry was ravenously devouring story material. As early as 1915, Essanay had filmed Wodehouse's book *A Gentleman of Leisure.* Successful Broadway plays made natural screen prospects, and Wodehouse's plays were no exception. *Oh! Lady! Lady!!* was filmed with Bebe Daniels as the lead, *Their Mutual Child* with Margarita Fischer.

The 1920s saw P.G. Wodehouse's star continue to grow. As well as the increasing popularity of his most enduring characters - Bertie Wooster and his valet Jeeves - and the publication of many more novels, film adaptations of his work continued apace. There was a further film version of *A Gentleman of Leisure* in 1923, and a British series of films, *The Clicking of Cuthbert,* based on his golfing stories of the same name.

In 1926, Wodehouse revisited *Oh! Lady! Lady!!*, adapting it into a serialised story for *Liberty* magazine called *The Small Bachelor*. In contrast to the distinct English flavour of the *Jeeves* stories, it was set in New York's Greenwich Village. The tale of the eponymous singleton George Finch's romantic involvement with Molly Waddington featured a typical Wodehousian assortment of eccentric characters, not least Molly's father Sigsbee H Waddington. Mr Waddington is obsessed with the Wild West, and much of the comedy arises from his gauche enthusiasm for the subject.

The focus on American setting and culture in the story probably made *The Small Bachelor* especially appealing to Hollywood Film producers. Sure enough, in February 1927, it was announced that Universal had snapped up the rights to a film version. To portray Wodehouse's comic cast, a fine ensemble of character actors was recruited.

Top-billed was Barbara Kent, a vivacious actress who would shortly have her finest role in the wonderful *Lonesome* (1928). Miss Kent would also appear opposite Harold Lloyd in his first two talkies, *Welcome Danger* and *Feet First*. Though her career fizzled out during the 1930s, she went on to be one of the longest survivors of the silent era, passing away in 2011, aged 104. Playing opposite her as George Finch was André Beranger (sometimes billed as Paul Beranger), a fine light comedy lead, whose other work includes the delightful *Are Parents People?* (1924).

The plum comic role of Sigsbee Waddington fell to Lucien Littlefield. Prematurely bald, his shining dome – and a terrific acting ability – enabled him to play all manner of roles beyond his years (he's just 31 years old in *The Small Bachelor!)*. Littlefield could portray birdlike timidity, egg-headed academia or gruff eccentricity with equal facility; thus cinema audiences came to recognise him as a succession of doctors, dentists, henpecked husbands, mad professors, doddery fathers-in-law, and butlers both aloof and timorous. Littlefield continued in such character parts until the late 1950s, each passing year reducing his need for make-up. Comedy fans especially cherish two of his appearances with Laurel & Hardy: the vet masquerading as a doctor in *Sons of The Desert*, and the unhinged Professor Noodle in *Dirty Work*.

Also in the cast is haughty Gertrude Astor, who excelled in sneering society ladies, and vamping heartthrobs. Her most memorable silent film roles were as Gloria Swanson's rival in *Stage Struck* and as the gold-digger who attaches herself to Harry Langdon in *The Strong Man.* Later she found frequent supporting roles at Hal Roach studios; in the sound era, she huffs and snarls her way through a turn as Mrs Oliver Hardy in *Come Clean* and suffers indignity at the hands of The Three Stooges in *Tassels in The Air*. Enjoyable trivia note: Astor was maybe the only silent film actress to have begun her showbiz career as a trombonist!

And the great comic character actors keep on comin' in *The Small Bachelor.* Monocled silly ass William Austin is a perfect visualisation of Wodehouse's brainless, chinless aristocrats. He was a few months away from his role in Clara Bow's *It* when *The Small Bachelor* was filmed. Lanky George Davis was a regular in comedies made at Educational Pictures. Specialising in portraying dumb authority, he's perfect for the role of Officer Garroway, a policeman with ill-starred dreams of becoming a poet. Tom Dugan could always be counted on to be a model of square-jawed stupidity; his best roles include a brain-dead detective in Charley Chase's *The Way of All Pants*, and in Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be,* as the Polish actor who impersonates Hitler.

Directing this fabulous cast was Universal's light comedy specialist, William A. Seiter (for more on Seiter, see Michelle Facey's notes for this afternoon's screening of *Why Be Good?)*. All of these talents bring their consummate skill to help make *The Small Bachelor* an enjoyable piece of entertainment. As both a contemporary adaptation of Wodehouse, and as a vision of Jazz-Age America refracted through an Englishman's lens, then turned back to Hollywood, it's quite fascinating.

Wodehouse's intersection with Hollywood would culminate in an unhappy tenure as writer at MGM from 1929-31. As with most of the more idiosyncratic talent handled by the studio, he felt alienated by its assembly-line approach to making films, by its inefficiencies and totalitarian demands. Comments he made to that effect in *The New York Times* brought an end to his career at the studio. Undaunted, he continued to produce books and plays for the remaining forty years of his life. As for *The Small Bachelor,* both story and film were soon overshadowed by subsequent Wodehouse novels and dramatisations. The film was almost entirely forgotten, and has been lost for many years. Tonight's screening is the first time the film has been shown in public for almost a century. Our thanks to Christopher Bird, who rediscovered the film and is generously allowing us to show it this evening.

LIMOUSINE LOVE (USA, 1928)

Hal Roach/MGM. Released April 14th, 1928. Two reels. Directed by Fred L. Guiol. Cast: Charley Chase, Edna Marion, Viola Richard, Edgar Kennedy, Bull Montana, Lincoln Plummer.

Accompanying this screening of *The Small Bachelor* is a short comedy featuring one of the silent era's most accomplished farceurs, Charley Chase. Writer, director, gagman and performer, Chase was a comedy powerhouse, and from 1924 until 1936, he was a mainstay of the Hal Roach Studios output. During that time, he crafted dozens of wonderfully intricate two-reel comedies in which he played a nice young man whose good intentions frequently led him into complex and embarrassing situations, which were sometimes quite risqué. *Limousine Love* is perhaps the ultimate example: Charley manages to (innocently) acquire a naked Viola Richard in the back of his car on the way to his wedding. Trying to find a way to get rid of her without compromising the young lady's dignity, he calls on the help of a hitchhiker (Edgar Kennedy), who – naturally - turns out to be her husband. The film is an excellent exhibition of both Chase's comic invention, and the warm, human comedy style prevalent at the Hal Roach Studios at this time. No matter how ridiculous things get, the characters are all essentially real people; this is one of the key factors in the films' continuing appeal.

Matthew Ross