

# The 19<sup>th</sup> British Silent Film Festival



## *Men Like These* (1931)

UK 1931

Friday 15 September, 10.15am

Introduced by Laraine Porter



UK 1931, Sound

**Production company:** British International Pictures

**Director:** Walter Summers

**Producer:** Walter C. Mycroft

**Story and screenplay:** Walter Summers, Walter C. Mycroft

**Photography:** Jack Parker, Horace Wheddon

**Editor:** Leslie Norman

**Art directors:** John Mead, James Marchant; **Sound recording:** Alec Murray; **Sound system:** RCA Photophone; **Studio:** British International Pictures, Elstree. **Shooting:** August–September 1931. **Running time:** 46 minutes; **BFI print:** 44 minutes

**Cast:** John Batten, Syd Crossley, James Enstone, Edward Gee, John Hunt (Commander), Charles Peachey, Sydney Seaward (Petty Officer), Valentine White, James Watts, Chang Fat, Wang Wong

***The Bioscope*, 19 August 1931, p. 20-21, W. H. Mooring:**

"Thrilling scenes are being shot this week for inclusion in the submarine film which Walter Summers is directing for British International. Based on the story of the recent disaster of the *Poseidon*, it is to include shots reminiscent of the extraordinary escape which some of the sailors trapped in that submarine were able to effect by using the Davis Life-Saving Apparatus. For the past week, the artists who are to take part in these shots have been trained in the proper use of the apparatus, and all this week Walter Summers is taking underwater shots of the men escaping from the sunken submarine, a sectional replica of which has been erected in a huge water tank at the British International studios. Cameras

are operated in special galleries around the tanks . . . . Walter Summers is convinced he can make . . . a sensationally realistic construction of the *Poseidon* disaster."

***Kinematograph Weekly*, 12 November 1931, p. 39:**

"It is seldom that such a realistic film as this is produced in any country. It is one which we have no hesitation in describing as a masterpiece of pictorial realism. The production deals with a submarine disaster in which the survivors, sunk fathoms deep in the ocean, are subjected to a test of courage in which the British spirit is shown at its intrepid best . . . If we had space we could talk at length of the wonderful technical effects and the impression they create, but it would be a waste of time. It is sufficient to say that Summers has managed to depict a disaster in a submarine in a manner that calls forth all that is wholly convincing and highly dramatic at the same time. There is no theatricality; one lives with the men whose lives are so obviously not worth a moment's purchase, and one comes away with a feeling of patriotic pride that the treatment of the picture makes entirely justifiable . . . Such realism as this, which depicts the spirit that animates the British Navy, is sure of a widespread appeal among our nationals. It is, indeed, difficult to conjecture what sort of an audience it would be that could not be thrilled and fascinated by this epic of courage."

***Variety*, 17 November 1931, p. 26, Chap.:**

"Before they had half-finished this one, British International discovered the Admiralty would not allow any publicity connection to be drawn between the film and the *Poseidon* submarine disaster, on which the film is obviously based . . .

Filmgoers seeing this picture will inevitably compare it with *Men Without Women*, the Fox picture. It lacks story, lacks all the conventional screen trappings, although it has an unforced humor. But it has one surprising virtue – speed. The thing starts and ends within the hour. Wreck happens in the first 10 minutes. There is none of the usual British picture dithering around the various developments. Frankly, it struck this reviewer as a first-class piece of work, marred somewhat by some mock-heroics here and there in the dialog . . .

The film is concerned with the engine crew of a British submarine rammed by a cargo boat in Chinese waters. The way this crew, under the leadership of a petty officer stood by and let the water rise to their necks, finally making their getaway through the turret with the aid of safety jackets, is now a part of English naval history . . .

Occasional suggestions of clumsiness in cutting, and the always awkward appearance of titles and dialog commentary cannot be helped. The film stands as a record of a great feat of valor, and emerges as a corking piece of entertainment for the English market . . ."

**Walter Mycroft, *The Time of My Life: The Memoirs of a British Film Producer* (published 2006), pp. 29-30:**

"Not everybody liked Walter Summers. I did . . . Walter was like whipcord and buzzed with energy like a whipped top. He was one of the sixty-five inchers, like Charles I, Napoleon, and myself. But every inch was concentrated activity. He was a tyrant on the floor, hated and hateful, sardonic and savage. He had a code which was to spare neither himself nor

anybody else. if a script called for a fire, Walter would have real fire, not fake fire, and would very soon discover that his players had to go through fire. They would protest. Walter would calmly stroll through the flames to show them how . . . It must be accounted to him that he made the naval war spectacles [like *The Battles of the Coronel and Falkland Islands*], films fine and spacious, at a time when British films never were. Walter's idea of the ideal in filmmaking would always be where he could order battleships about."

**Steven R. Schwankert, *Poseidon: China's Secret Salvage of Britain's Lost Submarine*, 2013, Hong Kong University Press, describing viewing the BFI's print, pp. 131-132:**

"It took several days of searching to find an archive that had the entire film, spread over several reels. BFI in London had a full copy, but it was still on nitrate film . . . I wondered how I could view a nitrate film reel, but the BFI solved the problem directly. They cleaned the film and transferred it to a DVD so that I and other interested viewers could watch it in their viewing rooms.

Upon arriving at the institute's central London location, I paid the viewing fee of about £8. I wondered what movie fans of 1931 – or the film's producers – would have thought of someone paying that much to see it, over seventy-five years later. A staff member directed me to the viewing room said in his best Cockney, "I watched a bit of it. The sound effects are like a geezer blowing through a straw".

I laughed at his assessment of the film's technical highlights and then settled in to watch it . . ."

*Programme note compiled by Geoff Brown*



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