

HEAD OF THE FAMILY

H. MANNING HAYNES, GREAT BRITAIN, 1922

Screening: Friday 20 April, 3:30pm



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The Head of the Family, released in March 1922, concludes our trawl through the back catalogues of Lydia Hayward, the scenarist, and H. Manning Haynes, the director, for this year's British Silent Film Festival. It is actually the earliest of the three Hayward-penned films screened at this year's Festival, preceding yesterday's Festival opener, *A Bachelor's Baby*, by one year. Hayward wrote the scenario for *A Bachelor's Baby*, but it was directed by Arthur Rooke. *The Head of the Family* is the third collaboration between Lydia Hayward and H. Manning Haynes, with the two others being *Monty Works The Wires* (1921, co-directed with Challis Sanderson) and last year's Festival hit, *The Skipper's Wooing* (1922).

Once H. Manning Haynes began to direct films without a partner, he immediately commenced a series of adaptations of the novels and short stories of W. W. Jacobs. Jacobs was renowned for his use of charming coastal and rural idylls, and his stories tended to involve a courtship, which would, following a series of pitfalls, end in marriage. Jacobs' stories were serialised in *The Strand*, and he was cited as a major influence upon P. G. Wodehouse's writing. *The Head of the Family* involves a young sailor who, after shipping as a cook despite no knowledge of cooking, leaves his ship to try his hand as a land-lubber, much to the relief of his crew. The sailor, Letts (Charles Ashton), sits next to a woman still mourning the loss of her son and, in the original

Jacobs novel, the following exchange takes place:

"Fine day," said Mr. Letts, lighting another cigarette.

The woman assented and sat looking over the sea.

"Ever done any cooking?" asked Mr. Letts, presently.

"Plenty," was the surprised reply. "Why?"

"I just wanted to ask you how long you would boil a bit o' beef," said Mr. Letts.

"Only from curiosity; I should never ship as cook again."

He narrated his experience of the last few days, and, finding the listener sympathetic, talked at some length about himself and his voyages; also of his plans for the future.

"I lost my son at sea," said the woman, with a sigh. "You favour him rather."

Mr. Letts's face softened. "Sorry," he said. "Sorry you lost him, I mean."

"At least, I suppose he would have been like you," said the other; "but it's nine years ago now. He was just sixteen."

Mr. Letts--after a calculation--nodded. "Just my age," he said. "I was twenty-five last March."

"Sailed for Melbourne," said the woman. "My only boy."

The woman takes Letts in and, posing as her son, he attempts to stop the bullying ways of her second husband. The exchange highlights the subtlety of Jacobs' dialogue, the soft humour and warmth of phrase, and his ability to develop character from just a few inquisitive lines. The ambition and ability of Lydia Hayward, then, in adapting Jacobs' work into silent cinema should not be undervalued.

CAST

Johnny Butt - Green

Cynthia Murtagh -
Betty Foster

John Ashton - Robert
Letts

Daisy England - Mrs.
Green

Bertie White - Henry
Widden

Moore Marriott -
Mate

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Points of Appeal

There is a mild humour throughout, and the knowledge that Jacobs is the author lends the whole thing a glamour that will no doubt enhance its appeal to most audiences.

The types are well chosen and all convey their own special appeal. Here and there the incidents achieve real comedy, particularly when Letts forces Green to accompany him on a fishing expedition. The efforts of Letts to cook for the crew are also highly humorous. Widden is a comic character of a somewhat exaggerated type, but he will amuse the average audience.

Production

The production is good. The casting has been well done and the types excellently chosen. The film is well set and admirably lit, and the continuity perfectly clear. The exteriors, especially the sea shots, are excellent. The direction has been very good and has produced a telling effect of restraint in the acting.

Acting

Johnny Butt as Green achieves an admirable piece of characterisation. His acting is restrained and thoroughly convincing, and his facial expressions are good.

Charles Ashton as Robert Letts invests his role with the necessary infectious gaiety, and makes a splendid foil to the surly and ponderous Green.

Daisy-England is good as Mrs Green, and provides the needed touch of pathos, and Cynthia Murtagh as Betty makes an effective heroine.

Bertie White plays the difficult part of Widden extremely well; he is of necessity a somewhat exaggerated type, but he keeps his role within his bounds.

Photography

Very good indeed

Suitability

A good comedy for any hall

Marketing

AN AUTHOR BOOKING

Use the author's name as much as you can. Jacobs' fame is world-wide, and, adequately exploited it should in itself suffice to draw the crowds.

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