

KIPPS: THE STORY OF A SIMPLE SOUL

HAROLD SHAW, GREAT BRITAIN, 1921

Screening: Sunday 22 April, 1.30 pm



Images courtesy of the bfiStills, Posters and Designs

Kipps: the Story of a Simple Soul is a remarkable attempt by the scenarist Frank Miller and director Harold Shaw to adapt H. G. Wells' novel of the same name to the screen, and was well-received by the trade press upon its release in September 1921. Wells himself was very impressed with Frank Miller's scenario; *Kipps* was his self-professed favourite work, and H. G. Wells himself appears as an extra in the film.

Particular praise was reserved for George K. Arthur, who plays the titular Kipps, the draper's assistant who, coming into a significant inheritance, resolves to become a gentleman and marry the middle-class tutor of the wood-carving class he frequents, but is unable to forget the girl-next-door he fell for as a young orphan. *Kinematograph Weekly* designated his performance the highlight of the film, noting that 'George K. Arthur gives the impression that... he might become an English Charles Ray – by no means an imitation of the representative of the American youthful lover and petty tradesman, but an English equivalent'. *Kipps* was actually the first

cinematic role for Arthurs but the strength of his performance led to a further sixty roles on screen, mainly during the silent era.

Harold Shaw, *Kipps'* director, was a veteran of silent cinema. He was well-travelled, directing 58 films (shorts and features) in 12 years, in at least 3 different national filmmaking climates; the majority of his films were made in his native America, but he also produced films in South Africa and the UK. *Kipps* is one of his British productions. Made for the Stoll Picture Company, it is probably his most celebrated film – and also one of his last. Shaw met his demise prematurely in 1926, at the age of 48, in a Los Angeles car crash, and his last film – *A Fool's Awakening* – was released in 1924.

Harold Shaw regularly cast a significant star of British silent cinema, John East, in his films. East appears in *Kipps* in a bit-part role as Old Kipps and his story, as recounted by Matthew Sweet in his excellent work of cultural archaeology, *Shepperton Babylon*, is typical of many stars of British silent cinema whose careers were forgotten even before the advent of sound. East, Sweet writes, 'received 3,640 votes in *Picturegoer* magazine's [1916] poll to determine the identity of the "Greatest British Film Player"'. In 1924, he was plugging his rotten teeth with candle wax and being paid peanuts by the *Daily Sketch* to galumph up and down the promenade at Margate, disguised as Uncle Oojah, the newspaper's cartoon elephant' (pp. 15-6).

CAST

George K. Arthur—
Kipps

Edna Flugrath—Ann
Pornick

Christine Rayner—
Helen Walshingham

Norman Thorpe—Mr
Chester Coote

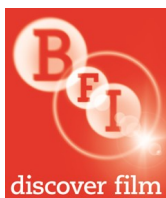
Teddy Arundell—
Harry Chitterlow

Arthur Helmore—Mr
Shalford

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The 15th British Silent Film Festival



THE BIOSCOPE

January 27, 1921, page 63

Faithful and entertaining version of H. G. Wells delightful novel- Remarkable performance by George K. Arthur in the title role. Characteristic scenes of English life vividly staged in a first-rate production.

A remarkable performance by a character comedian new to the screen in the outstanding feature of this carefully made version of H. G. Wells' entertaining novel. The delightful study by George K. Arthur of the gawky linen-draper's apprentice who tried to become a "gentleman," is a perfect realisation of the author's conception and will certainly give the most complete satisfaction to those who know the book. Admirable, too, are the village scenes and the pictures of life in a provincial drapery emporium in which the early career of Kipps is passed. The shop settings, in particular, have so life like an atmosphere that they might be real interiors.

The story of Kipps meteoric rise and fall is told in a series of incidents, mainly humorous in character. The adapter has followed the lines of the novel throughout instead of reshaping the action in conventional dramatic form.

Such episodes as *Kipps'* festive night with the dramatist (played with expensive food humour by Teddy Arundel), his initiation into the dreary life of a shop assistant and his convivial farewell to Shalfords are almost self-contained playlets, rich in natural comedy. The underlying vein of social satire has not been emphasised, but there are many moments of pretty sentiment, and even pathos.

Apart from Mr Arthur's brilliant work as the uncouth but human hero, the acting is excellent throughout a long and carefully selected cast. Such smaller roles as Mr Shalford and the head assistant at the shop are particularly well played, with the result that the human atmosphere is as realistic as the settings.

Exteriors at Folkestone and in the London streets add to the vivid naturalism of the production. The interiors made inside the Savoy Hotel are interesting. The staging, notable for its attention to detail, is characteristic of the careful methods of the producer, Harold Shaw.

As an entertainment, "*Kipps*" should make a first-rate attraction at almost any theatre. The broad human qualities of the story, and its irresistible humour will make the widest possible appeal. Without doubt, this is a Stoll chef d'oeuvre.

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The original reviews may be abridged.

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