



The 15th British Silent Film Festival

LIVINGSTONE



In association with the Archive Film Agency

M. A. WETHERELL, GREAT BRITAIN, 1926

Screening: Saturday 21 April, 9 am



Images courtesy of the BFI Stills, Posters and
Designs

Director, actor and writer Marmaduke Arundel Wetherell is a little-known character in the history of British cinema. His screen credits as an actor include playing Oliver Cromwell in the Eliot Stannard-scripted short *Curfew Must Not Ring Tonight* (1923) alongside his starring roles in his own films: *Livingstone* (1925) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1927). Born in 1889, he started his career as a film actor in South Africa, making films in Britain between 1923 and 1927. He died in (the then) Rhodesia in 1939. Wetherell was one of those independent producer/directors who occupied the fringes British film industry during the difficult period of the mid 1920s: people like Fred Paul and Geoffrey Malins who drifted from company to company with varying degrees of success. In *The History of the British Film*, Rachael Low describes Wetherell as 'an attractive figure in many ways, his good intentions were not realised by his films, which were naive and roughly made' (p155). Low slightly revises her opinion when she later describes him as an 'interesting camera adventurer'. However, Wetherell was in demand for his reputation as an actuality and location producer and was brought

in to work on New Era's production of *The Somme* (1927) when the original producer, Barkas, fell ill. *Livingstone* was filmed in Africa from 1923 onwards with Gustav Pauli as cameraman.

The film capitalises on the contemporary admiration for David Livingstone in British popular culture and the film's press book alludes to Livingstone topping the poll in a 'well known magazine' as 'the noblest Briton who ever lived'. Wetherell appears to have been as interested in re-tracing Livingstone's route across Africa despite the logistics; travelling 25,000 miles by boat, train and 1,200 miles on foot to reach the more remote parts of Central Africa (Tanganyika and Nyasaland). Throughout the journey they carried two cameras and tripods to film 'on the hoof' when the opportunities arose for capturing interesting wildlife or scenery.

The film makes much of the stunning African landscape and it is also noteworthy for its naturalistic and respectful portrayal of the indigenous African Tribes people encountered en route, particularly when compared to other imperialist dramas set in Africa and made during this period. Wetherell clearly had a respect and affinity for his subjects, and the film is interesting as an ethnographical document in addition to its portrayal of David Livingstone and his mission to abolish the slave trade.

Robinson Crusoe followed in 1927 and Wetherell is clearly in his element, again playing the lead role, on location and performing a range of 'boys' own' adventures and survival skills with only the ship's dog for company before the arrival of Man Friday.

CAST

M. A. Wetherell -

David Livingstone

Henry Walton - H. M.
Stanley

Douglas Cator -

Robert Moffat

Molly Rogers - Mary
Moffat

Blanche Graham -
Queen Victoria

CREATIVE
ENGLAND



A GREAT ENTERPRISE

“LIVINGSTONE” is a film more romantic in its making than any motion-picture yet produced.

The Expedition left England on 26th October, 1923, by R.M.S. “Windsor Castle,” reaching Cape Town on 17th November, 1923, and left Zanzibar, on its return, on 19th October, 1924, by S.S. “General Duchesne,” reaching England on 8th November, 1924, having in the meantime travelled close upon 25,000 miles, in order to make the African portion of the Film. The two ladies, however, only travelled as far as Kuruman, Cape Province, whence they returned, reaching England on Christmas Eve, 1923.

It has followed, as far as possible, the actual route of Livingstone’s great journeys ; with this difference, however, that in the southern and more settled portions of the country the railway has been available, where Livingstone was compelled to use the cumbrous, slow-moving ox-wagon, with its maximum speed of about two miles an hour. In the wilder parts of Central Africa—Nyasaland and Tanganyika—it travelled, as Livingstone did, on foot, with native porters to carry the baggage. Steamship, railway-train, canoe, ox-wagon, motor-car and human feet—these were the various means of transport on the journey.

Through Nyasaland and Tanganyika the Expedition walked upwards of 1,200 miles, carrying throughout this portion of the trek two “movie” cameras mounted on their tripods and ready for instant action ; in this way several wonderful pictures of game, which otherwise would have been lost, were secured. Most of this work was done in the tsetse country, where the fly is fatal to all domestic animals.

M. A. WETHERELL

ACTOR, film-artist and producer, the maker of “Livingstone” has spent some fifteen years of his life in Africa, about four of them farming and big-game hunting in Northern Rhodesia. His Kaffir name is Hantapania—a sort of portmanteau-word, meaning “He who hits seldom, but, when he does, hits mighty hard.”

He inspired and produced this picture, and himself plays David Livingstone.



M. A. WETHERELL

THE BIOSCOPE

February 5, 1925, page 37

This remarkable British enterprise, which involved a journey of 25,000 miles, represents an attempt to produce a picture combining the qualities of travel film and human document. The attempt may be said to have succeeded in both respects. Certainly no better subject could have been found than the life and travels of the famous missionary with whose career it deals.

Mr Wetherell has skilfully balanced his character sketch and personal story of Livingstone with the scenic features of the production so that they help each other. Thus, the picture is more dramatic than an ordinary travel record, and far wider and more varied in interest than a mere biography.

Of the African scenes, which constitute the major portion of the production, it would be difficult to speak too highly. They convey the atmosphere of that mysterious land far more effectively than the ordinary, baldly realistic scenic picture, because one sees them through the eyes of an adventurous explorer; and, at the same time, they are free from undue theatricism.

The film is so novel and that the same time so entertaining that its appeal should be wide if it is properly exploited....It was a mistake to give the first performance at the Albert Hall, at what appeared to be a semi-religious gathering of an unusually depressing character. The film is far from being mere religious propaganda.

