

THE STORY OF IRISH FILM

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PRESS

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PREFACE

My love for cinema began as a child in Bray, Co Wicklow. I was a regular matinee-goer to the Royal and Roxy, and savoured the adventures of Hopalong Cassidy, Old Mother Reilly and Humphrey Bogart chasing The Maltese Falcon.

Some years later, with the opening of Ardmore Studios in the town, I could actually see films being shot. I remember watching Robert Mitchum and a youthful Richard Harris being directed in a scene on the banks of the Dargle, of seeing James Cagney barking orders on a hilltop in Glenree, of witnessing spectacular dog-fights over Calary Bog, and Laurence Harvey in a makeshift graveyard beside the gasometer. I saw how a scene was created from words on a page, how sets were constructed, and how the tricks of the trade, like back-production and painted backdrops had deceived me and millions of cinema-goers.

Over the following years I conducted interviews with stars and directors for numerous newspaper and magazine articles. I also wrote a book on Irish films for the Irish Environmental Library Series. This gave me a deeper insight into the motivation and philosophies of film makers.

In this book I have outlined the development of film-making in Ireland from the first screening at the Star of Erin Music Hall in Dame Street on 20 April 1896, through the jerky one-reelers at the turn of the century to the multi-dollar productions of today. I have also detailed the efforts of an emerging band of contemporary vibrant young Irish film-makers.

My task was to write the story of film-making in Ireland, which was chiefly the production of feature films by foreign directors. Up to the late 1970s the Irish

contribution was confined almost entirely to shorts and documentaries. Native feature film-making only began on an acceptable level following the foundation of the Irish Film Board. Prior to this important one-off works did emerge from Irish directors. One of the earliest examples was *The Dawn* in 1936, acted by amateurs in Killarney and directed by Tom Cooper. Unfortunately there was no follow-up.

The notable point about the pre-Ardmore days was that the majority of films shot on location had an Irish setting, e.g. *Odd Man Out*, *The Quiet Man* and *Captain Boycott*. There were some exceptions such as Olivier's *Henry V* and Huston's *Moby Dick*. When Ardmore opened, the balance swung in the opposite direction with settings as varied as Germany, France, China and the United States. During the 1970s, Dublin was the location for a series of quickie Italian and German films.

I outline the turbulent forty-six year history of Ardmore Studios in which it changed ownership several times with a number of receivers to its present position. I describe the films produced there by leading directors ranging from Carol Reed, Martin Ritt, Henry Hathaway to John Huston, John Boorman and Stanley Kubrick. A little known fact is that a thriller entitled *Dementia 13*, made at the studio in 1963, was directed by Francis Ford Coppola – ten years before he directed *The Godfather*. Ardmore brought in the big names – Cagney, Mitchum, Olivier, Burton, Hepburn, Steiger, O'Toole and Connery. It was still only a service industry that supplied facilities for visiting production companies. It did little to foster an indigenous Irish film industry.

The early 1990s saw the first indications of an unprecedented upturn in the fortunes of film-making in Ireland by both indigenous directors and foreign companies availing of the tax breaks of Section 35 of the Finance Act and locations in the country. A number of factors contributed to this welcome development, beginning with the two Oscars for *My Left Foot*, the nomination of Richard Harris for *The Field* and Neil Jordan's Oscar for the screenplay of *The Crying Game*. Coinciding with these achievements, Michael D. Higgins, on his appointment as Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, took a keen interest in the film industry. He immediately re-established the Irish Film Board and set various training programmes in motion, dealing with all aspects of film. This resulted in a number of low budget films being produced such as Gerry Stembridge's *Guiltrip* to the multi-million dollar productions from *Michael Collins* and *Braveheart* to *King Arthur*.

The book includes a filmography of all feature films, made partly or entirely in Ireland, complete with date, director and stars.

BIRTH OF THE CINEMA

No one man invented the ‘motion picture’. It was the product of scientists, artists and businessmen working independently in many parts of the world.

The magic lantern, which appeared in the sixteenth century, was the precursor of the film. It consisted of a series of drawings which, when spun and viewed through slits, gave the illusion of motion. A form of this technique – little figures on the corners of copybook pages – has amused children for generations.

The next development was the replacement of the drawings with photographs. This process, called chronophotography, was developed by a number of scientists towards the end of the nineteenth century. Continuous research and advancing technology led the American, George Eastman, to perfect a system of printing images onto a continuous roll of celluloid film. Numerous variations on this format were made, including Thomas Edison’s Kinetoscope, a type of peep show through which moving pictures could be viewed.

It seemed a natural progression to project the moving images onto a screen large enough for an audience to view. The efforts to do so turned into a worldwide race with many countries intent on being the first onto the field. The blueprints and experiments of the competitors were closely guarded secrets.

Finally, on 20 February 1896, at the Grand Café, Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, Louis and Auguste Lumière showed the first moving pictures to a paying public. This new form of entertainment was an instant success with the audience clamouring for more. Depicted in those first films were action sequences of people and transport and newsreel footage of processions and meetings.

The success of the Paris cinema led to the opening of many more around the world. Outside the major cities, films were screened wherever a showing could be arranged – in parish halls, fairgrounds, music halls, markets and anywhere people were liable to gather. Films were sometimes included in music-hall bills. In the initial years cinema passed into the hands of the travelling fairground showmen who transformed their puppet shows and lit-up theatres. This was particularly the case in Ireland. By 1908, permanent cinemas were being built on a wide scale.

In May 1897, the gradually developing cinema in France suffered a severe blow when a projectionist's carelessness resulted in a fire that claimed 140 lives. Following this, the authorities imposed more stringent controls on public performances. France was also to the forefront in producing the first dramatic film, *The Story of a Crime*, in 1901. America followed two years later with Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*.

The earliest producers in England had been in the main either enthusiastic photographers or inventors who created short films at very little cost and were astonished at the profits they could accrue on a successful production. Cecil Hepworth, one of the most prominent film pioneers in England, was responsible for many of the early short films in Ireland. In 1905 he was to make England's first dramatic film, *Rescued by Rover*.

In Ireland, films began to be produced from the end of the nineteenth century. They were in the main current affairs shorts that dealt with meetings, exhibitions, races and visits of prominent people. There was even a brief record of the Dublin Horse Show. Most of these films were combined to form an evening's entertainment. Dan Lowry exhibited them at the Star of Erin Music Hall in Dame Street, Dublin on 20 April 1896, when it was temporarily converted into a cinema. The following year the tinted films of Professor Joly of Paris were shown. Later that year, films were also shown at the Rotunda and Gaiety Theatres.

What must be the earliest Irish newsreel of any length was a documentary on the State visit of Queen Victoria to Dublin in 1900, starting with her arrival at Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire) and following her progress through streets lined with flag-waving crowds. Incidental films of Irish scenery and topicalities were also shot around the turn of the century. These include *The Fire Brigade Going out on a Call*, *A View from the Train on the Blackrock Line*, *Demolition of a Building* and *The Gordon Bennett Motor Race in Kildare*.

On 2 January 1905, the Irish Animated Photo Company showed a pictorial record of the major events of the preceding year in the Town Hall, Rathmines. The programme featured the ceremonies of the Consecration of Saint Patrick's

Cathedral, Armagh. There were close-ups of the prelates assisting at the event, and Cardinal Vanutell giving the papal blessing to the multitude. Local shots included congregations leaving churches in Rathgar and Rathmines in which individuals were clearly recognisable. The motion in them was jerky, the people goose-stepping much as they were to do in the later Mack Sennett comedies.

In America, production companies mushroomed and there was a vigorous battle to gain control of the booming film business. By 1909 there were at least nine separate companies. D. W. Griffith emerged as the architect of that country's supremacy in cinema. His pioneering forms and techniques were to remain largely unchanged for the next half-century. Initially, film production was based in New York, mainly because the leading actors worked on Broadway, but a number of factors, including better weather conditions and lower costs, soon drew the film-makers to Hollywood on the west coast.

1910 is an important date in the history of cinema, as it was the first occasion on which an American film company travelled outside the United States to film on location. The company was Kalem, founded in 1907 by Frank Marion, Samuel Long and George Klein.

In the spring of that year Marion called their top director, Sidney Olcott, to his office. Opening a large map of the world in front of him, he asked Olcott to choose whichever country he would like to visit with a full film-making unit. Olcott promptly pointed to the small island, where his mother was born, on the west coast of Europe. She was born in Dublin.

Olcott, who ranked second only to Griffith, was one of the most creative directors in America. He had begun his career as an actor and had directed his first screen version of *Ben Hur* in 1907. His brief was to search for new material and subsequently to produce films with suitable themes.

In August 1910, Olcott landed at Queenstown (now Cobh) and remained for a short period at the Victoria Hotel in Cork. Having toured Ireland, he went to Killarney where he stayed at the Glebe Hotel. He brought with him his leading lady, Gene Gauntier; Robert Vignola; and his cameraman, George Hollister. Gauntier later wrote *Blazing Trail*, describing her work with Olcott. The manuscript is on display in the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York. She and Olcott also collaborated on film projects and scenarios. They were two of the first people in the world to write specifically for the cinema.

Olcott's first film in Ireland was *The Lad from Old Ireland*, described as 'Kalem's Great Trans-Atlantic Drama'. Olcott also shot a number of shorts in Irish beauty spots such as Blarney Castle, Glengarriff and the Lakes of Killarney.



Opposite: Louis and August Lumière, who showed the first moving pictures to a paying public in Paris.

Below left: D.W. Griffith, dubbed by Charlie Chaplin as 'the teacher of us all'.

Below right: Sidney Olcott, from a promotional postcard, proclaiming him to be 'the original feature producer now making features in Ireland and Europe'.



On leaving Ireland the company moved to England, where they filmed *The Irish Honeymoon* and to Germany to make *The Little Spreewald Mädchen*.

The Lad from Old Ireland was such a huge success with Irish emigrants in America that Kalem decided to send a larger company the following year. In addition to Gauntier, Vignola and Hollister, Olcott also brought Jack P. McGowran from Australia, Alice Hollister (cinema's first vamp), Alice Maples, Jack Clarke, Pat O'Malley, Allan Farnham, Arthur Donaldson and Helen Lindroth.

When they returned in June 1911, Olcott felt that a country setting would better suit his purpose. While touring in a jaunting car, he discovered the village of Beaufort, about eight miles from Killarney and decided this was an ideal location. His efforts to explain his intentions caused much hilarity among the locals, as they knew nothing about motion pictures. Olcott enquired if they had ever seen a magic lantern show. Yes, they knew about lantern entertainments. 'Well,' said Olcott, 'films are like magic lantern slides, but they move.' They were still bewildered but were willing to assist Olcott and learn about this amazing new invention.

The company lodged in the hotel of Patrick O'Sullivan and his daughter, Annie. Olcott worked throughout the summer, filming interiors in a mock-up set on a platform which they constructed behind the hotel. They travelled throughout the county for exterior locations. On one occasion they travelled fifty miles to Dingle only to discover on arrival they had forgotten the camera.

Olcott's next film, *Rory O'Moore*, centred on the adventurers of the rebels of 1798 and principally of O'Moore, the romantic Emmet-like figure. The film made for boisterous, fast-moving entertainment. A print of the film is lodged in the British Film Institute Distribution Library. It is worth noting that this copy does not include the closing scene in which Rory departs by sailing boat for America. This sequence was filmed at Queenstown. At the time, Olcott was unaware of the explosive content of the material and the controversy that followed its release greatly annoyed the British Home Office.

The film also displeased the local clergy. The Sunday following the completion of the film, the O'Sullivans with Sidney Olcott and some of his crew attended Mass in the local Catholic church. The parish priest of Tuogh, Fr Daly, spoke from the pulpit of the evil element in the village represented by the Kalem Company, whose players dressed as priests and nuns. The village was shocked and a group of local men threatened to 'beat up' the sinners from America. Filming could not continue until Olcott and the American consul in Queenstown met with the local bishop. The bishop instructed the parish priest to apologise for his

remarks. Kalem became apprehensive and wanted to recall Olcott, but Olcott admitted his gaffe and promised to stay clear of such delicate subject matter in future. He was allowed to stay in Ireland.

From then on, the O'Kalems, as they jokingly called themselves, and the villagers became firm friends. There was no shortage of villagers willing to play small parts in the films at five shillings per day. Some even played quite important roles: Annie O'Sullivan was one of the female leads in *The Gypsies of Old Ireland*. The bulk of the films were shot in Beaufort, Dunloe and Killarney while much of the travelling was done on sidecars.

Olcott next turned his attention to Dion Boucicault's melodramas and filmed *The Colleen Bawn* starring Brian MacGowan. Olcott himself played the part of Danny Mahon. Then followed *Arrah-na-Pogue* with music specially composed by Walter Cleveland Simon. Other films included: *Robert Emmet, Ireland's Martyr*, starring Jack Melville and Pat O'Malley; *You'll Remember Ellen* (from Thomas Moore's poem); *The O'Neill* (from *Erin's Land*); *The Kerry Gow*; *A Girl of Glenbeigh*; *The Fishermaid of Ballydavid*; *Shaun the Post*; *The Kerry Dancer*; *The Shaughbraun*; *Conway* and *Ireland the Oppressed*.

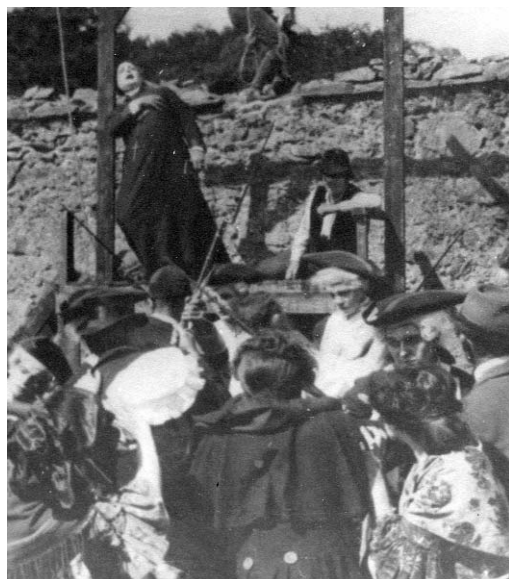
In 1912 Olcott and Gene Gauntier left Kalem and formed Gene Gauntier Feature Players. They returned to Beaufort in 1913, together with Jack J. Clarke, whom Gene Gauntier had married during the making of *From Manger to Cross* the previous year. The people of Beaufort believed that Olcott was deeply in love with Gauntier, and that he would have married her but for the fact that he was a devout Catholic and she had been divorced.

In August 1914, hundreds of Volunteers from all over Kerry and many other parts of Munster marched through the streets of Killarney, which were lined with cheering crowds. The local Killarney company was the centre of attraction but it was the only fully armed group in the parade. Due to the difficulty in obtaining arms the Volunteers had been using dummy rifles for training but the Kerry company was now equipped with rifles and bayonets. Members of the Royal Irish Constabulary were as baffled as the other onlookers as to the source of the arms. The explanation was simple. The rifles and bayonets were props of the Kalem Company. This was Olcott's discreet revenge for the earlier interference by the British authorities. Kalem filmed the competitions in signalling and drilling.

That same year Olcott formed Sid Films and returned yet again to Beaufort to produce a series of films starring Valentine Grant, who later became his wife. They planned to build a permanent studio in Beaufort enabling them to film all year round. He consistently claimed that he found it easy to direct the Irish people, as they were natural actors and actresses.



Gene Gautier and Jack Clarke in *You'll Remember Ellen*.



Kalem's *Rory O'Moore*.



Sidney Olcott's *The Kerry Dancers*.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War I put an end to their plans. In his eighteen weeks' stay in Beaufort, he made almost one film per week, each about three reels long and running approximately forty-five minutes. Lewis Jacobs maintains that these films succeeded in killing off the idea of the stage Irishman because they showed people in a realistic setting.

Despite not filming in Kerry again, Olcott and members of the company kept up a long correspondence with the people of the area. Annie O'Sullivan later spoke of how much the Kalem Company loved Beaufort and how they would pretend that their birthdays fell during their visit as an excuse to celebrate.

Alice Hollister recalled how she and Pat O'Malley had got together shortly before the latter's death in 1966, and talked about Beaufort all night. None of the other Kalems are alive today. Valentine Grant died in 1949, Jack P. McGowan died in 1952, Robert Vignola passed away in 1962 and Gene Gauntier in 1967. Following his wife's death, Olcott went to live with Vignola. A few weeks before Christmas of that year, Olcott wrote out his Christmas cards and parcelled up Valentine's jewellery to be sent to individuals that he felt she would want to give them too.

Shortly before Christmas, Annie O'Sullivan found two letters for her in the post. One was from Vignola informing her of Olcott's death. The second was from Olcott and enclosed was a gold bracelet belonging to his wife. He had never forgotten Beaufort.

THE IRISH PIONEERS

The outbreak of World War I was to remove European competition and establish America's dominance of world cinema. Ireland was to benefit as more American productions began travelling here.

In 1913 an American producer, Walter MacNamara, came to Dublin to make a film on Robert Emmet. He was introduced to an actor/manager, P. J. Bourke, who not only provided him with a shooting script but also made the costumes for the production. Bourke was paid £3 per day for his efforts. The film *Ireland a Nation*, which featured Barry O'Brien, concentrated on the life and times of Emmet and depicted later attempts in the nineteenth century to win Home Rule. It was shot in Baltinglass and Glendalough in Co Wicklow and ran to five reels.

In January 1917 the film had one public showing in Dublin because the British authorities quickly banned it. They felt that it raised contentious issues and interfered with recruitment to the army. The critics were generous in their reviews and found that the editing gave an exciting edge to the film. They explained that only in the courtroom scene was the audience aware of a static camera. Techniques rare for the period were close-ups and the panning shots. However, the film contained some anachronisms, including news of the Act of Union, 1801 being despatched to Father Murphy of Boolavogue fame, two years after his death; and inaccuracies such as Michael Dwyer marrying Anne Devlin and emigrating to Australia (Devlin was his niece). In 1920 the Gaelic Film Company added scenes from contemporary Ireland to bring it up to date. These showed the Auxiliaries, the Black and Tans, and the death of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney.

From 1913 onwards, most of the major events and leading figures in the national struggle were filmed. Unfortunately quite a considerable amount of film was either lost or destroyed. Part of what survived was used in George Morrison's two outstanding films, *Mise Éire* (1959) and *Saoirse?* (1961).

Around this period native film-makers, fascinated by this new medium, began to emerge. Many had theatrical backgrounds and some even combined the roles of actor and director. Of course there were also those who saw the possibilities in strictly commercial terms. Setting up a production company was not a difficult task. The initial outlay was on the camera, film, processing facilities and also, possibly, costumes. Actors were readily available, particularly from the Abbey Theatre. Many actors received no payment and others requested only a small remuneration. For most, the excitement of being in a film and seeing themselves on the screen was reward enough.

In 1915 the famed Abbey Theatre actor, F. J. McCormick directed and acted in a film called *Fun at Finglas Fair*, concerning the antics of two escaped convicts. It was written by Cathal MacGairbhígh and starred the Columbian Players. The film was never shown commercially, as British soldiers had broken into the cinema and accidentally destroyed the prints during the 1916 Rising. McCormick appeared in some later films of the Irish Film Company including *Irish Destiny* and *The Life of Michael Dwyer*. These films were primarily shot around Dublin and although there were not many cars in use at the time, an occasional one did accidentally appear in a period setting.

Producers believed that they had a ready market for their films in America, Italy, England, Australia and France, and more companies went into production. In March 1916, just before the Easter Rising, the Film Company of Ireland was established by an American diplomat and lawyer, James Mark Sullivan. Consisting chiefly of actors from the Abbey, this company produced such films as *O'Neill of the Glen* and *The Miser's Gift*, both directed by and starring J. M. Kerrigan. Other titles from this company included *Woman's Wit*, *Food of Love*, *Widow Malone* and *The Eleventh Hour*. In total they produced nine films. Like Sidney Olcott, they intended to show to the world that there was more to Ireland than the stereotypical 'pigs in the parlour'. The company also planned to build a large studio that winter and to install the best equipment available. This plan did not materialise, but they continued in production, chiefly shooting on location.

On 26 October 1916, the Dame Street Picture House showed *The Miser's Gift*, describing it as the first comedy production by the Film Company of Ireland. The same cinema, the following month, showed another of their productions, *An Unfair Love Affair*, directed by Kerrigan and starring Nora

Clancy and Fred O'Donovan. The versatile Kerrigan also directed and starred in *Puck Fair Romance*, co-starring Kathleen Murphy. Another important production in 1916 was *Molly Bawn*, directed by Cecil B. Hepworth and starring Alma Taylor and Stewart Lowe.

In 1917 the General Film Company of Ireland headed by Norman Whitten, with J. W. Mackey in charge of production and J. Gordon Lewis as cameraman, produced *In the Days of Saint Patrick*. The film directed by Whitten starred a well known Queen's Theatre actor, Ira Allan, in the title role. Alice Cardinal played Patrick's mother, George Griffin was King Laoghaire, Maud Hume the Queen and T. O'Carroll Reynolds played Niall of the Nine Hostages. One of the slaves was a black boxer named Cyclone Billy Warren, a notable character around Dublin for a long time. The main location was Rush, Co Dublin and the ambitious production featured pirate galleys and chariot races. The film took a year of patiently watching the weather and seasons to capture the perfect conditions for filming. The results more than justified the difficult conditions and the critics reviewed it warmly. *In the Days of Saint Patrick* was well received throughout Ireland and England by trade and public alike.

Whitten also ran a newsreel called *Irish Events* for which he had his own laboratory in Pearse Street, Dublin. At that time there were two other film laboratories in Dublin: The Irish Animated Picture Company, also in Pearse Street, and the Gaumont Company in Lord Edward Street. They shot newsreel film of Countess Markievicz and other prisoners and also the surviving leaders of the Easter Rebellion when they left prison in 1917. Other newsreel footage included the Conference of Ireland (excluding Sinn Féin members), which was convened by Lloyd George in Trinity College, and the funeral of Thomas Ashe. These latter films were preserved in the National Library.

This was a busy period with the following films in circulation: *The Upstart*, *Blarney*, *The Byeways of Fate* and *The Irish Girl*, all directed by J. M. Kerrigan, and *The First Irish National Pilgrimage to Lourdes*. The Film Company of Ireland announced their forthcoming films, *Rafferty's Rise*, directed by Kerrigan and a three-act comedy by Nicholas Hayes centring around a policeman, *When Love Came to Gavin Burke*, directed by Fred O'Donovan and starring Brian Moore and Kathleen Murphy. Later that year O'Donovan directed a screen version of Charles Kickham's novel *Knocknagow* in which Cyril Cusack made a fleeting appearance as a five-year old child evicted onto the roadside. Prominent members of the cast included Brian McGowan, J. McCarre and Alice Keating. The film was photographed by William Moser around Clonmel, Co Tipperary where it had its first screening. Other films in production circa this period were a comedy,



The chariot race from *In the Days of Saint Patrick* and opposite an advertisement for the film.



A Passing Shower, and two dramas, *A Man's Redemption* and *Cleansing Fires*.

Quite a number of the same names appear in the credits of these films as a repertory group of actors and crews had been assembled. They worked in harmony and moved from film to film. In 1917 the Irish Film Company announced that they had built up a library of 10,000 feet of Irish scenery and had compiled *A Serial of Twenty Irish Scenics*. Whitten's company produced other films of local interest, such as a visit to Patterson's match factory entitled *Matchmaking in Ireland*. He was approached by the Court Laundry to produce a film on their operation and Dubliners saw for the first time how their clothes were cleaned. Ireland's first animated film, 450 feet long, entitled *Ten Days Leave*, was also produced that year. It received its first public showing in the Bohemian Cinema, Phibsboro. Frank Leah was the animator and Jack Warren the director. Warren, an Englishman, was editor of an Irish magazine, *The Irish Limelight*, and Leah one of its regular contributors.

Over forty years before the opening of Ardmore Studios, Bray played a significant part in early film production. William Power, who returned from Manchester with the intention of making films to meet the demand for Irish pictures, was the leading figure in the project. He ran a barber's shop on Novara Road, which was as much a film studio and laboratory as it was a hairdresser's. In 1917 he set up a dramatic society so as to have a recruiting ground for his films. The following year he wrote, produced and directed a short comedy *Willie Scouts while Jesse Pouts*. Power was so pleased with the results and received such support locally that he founded the Celtic Film Company.

Power's second project was a more ambitious two-hour film, *Rosaleen Dhu*, a tale of a Fenian exiled from Ireland who joins the Foreign Legion. He meets and marries an Algerian girl who turns out to be heiress to a vast Irish estate. The film was shot mainly in the Bray area although they did travel as far as Arklow for the desert scenes and to Kilmacanogue for a crossroads sequence.

These early films were shot mainly by a camera in a fixed position but Power, with great foresight, invested in a camera capable of panning, for the princely sum of £88. While the camera and film was expensive the props and cast cost nothing. Extras were selected from amongst the eager onlookers. Frequently the company would neglect to ask permission to use private property. For example, a thatched cottage on Bray Head was used for an eviction scene unknown to the owner, a farmer who was milking his cows in an adjoining field. The hero's farewell took place on a coalboat that had been anchored in Bray harbour for over a week. When Power got word that the boat was about to sail he left a man half shaved in the barber's chair. He gathered his crew, rushed to the harbour and shot the scene.

The film was processed in wooden barrels in a small yard behind the barber's shop and later sub-titled in the tiny laboratory.

Rosaleen Dhu was premiered in Mac's, a cinema housed in the old Turkish Baths in Bray. A warm reception from the local audience led to its screening nationwide. An even greater boost came from the offer of £2,000 for it from an American film company.

Greatly encouraged by their success Power planned his second feature, *An Irish Vendetta*, with himself in the leading role. He decided that those taking part in the film would receive shares and thus be fairly rewarded for their efforts. They were filming the story's climax on Leopardstown racecourse when tragedy struck. Power's horse bolted, throwing him onto the railings. Two days later on 6 June 1920 he died in the Mater Hospital. The floods in Little Bray destroyed one copy of *Rosaleen Dhu*. Not a single still or frame of any of William Power's work has survived.

In 1922 Charles McConnell, became chairman of another Irish film company, Irish Photoplays. Other founding members of the company were Fred Jeffs, Senator George Nesbitt and a Londoner, Kenneth Hartley. They financed the making of three films: *The O'Casey Millions*, *Wicklow Gold* and *Cruiskeen Lawn*. The latter concerned horse racing and was directed by Norman Whitten. Harry O'Donovan was property master for the company.

McConnell recalled those days:

We didn't make money from them, but we did cover ourselves. The stars of the films, as we liked to call them, were paid peanuts compared with even small time players of today. The 'extras' were often delighted to work just for the thrill of being in a film.

I remember Jimmy O'Dea quite well. He was very young and shy and mostly played straight parts, like in *The O'Casey Millions* when he was the romantic lead. He revealed great talent even at that early stage and I knew he would have a big future in films. I didn't see him then the great comedian he was later to become, but he had a lively and loveable sense of humour.

We looked upon the film-making as an adventure and great fun. It was grand working with such dedicated people as Jimmy, Thomas Moran, Fay Sergeant, Chris Silvester, Nan Fitzgerald, Fred Jeffs, Kathleen Drago and Barrett McDonnell.

McConnell was proud of the fact that all those early films were scripted, photographed, produced and directed by an Irish team.

I realised at the time that this small country could not compete with the



Above left: Jimmy O'Dea, Nan Fitzgerald and Fred Jeffs in *The O'Casey Millions*.

Above right: Charles McConnell, chairman of Irish Photoplays Ltd, which had capital of £10,000.



Opposite: Frances Alexander in *Willie Reilly and His Colleen Bawn*, which was shot on location in Rathfarnham, Dublin.



Barry Fitzgerald and Maureen Delaney in a scene from *Land of Her Fathers*.

film-makers of Britain and America with all their millions. But our little films – they ran for about an hour – were a success on the cinema circuit in Ireland and were actually shown in America, I must mention John MacDonagh, who scripted and produced *The O'Casey Millions*. He was very gifted.

MacDonagh, brother of the executed Rising leader, Thomas, was a well-known contributor to Radio Éireann and wrote the script for all three films. He later made *Paying the Rent* and *Willie Reilly and his Colleen Bawn* and was involved with other films as writer, director, producer and actor. This latter film was one of the most popular and successful of the Film Company of Ireland's production and starred Brian McGowan and Frances Alexander. The film, based on the 1855 novel by William Carleton, was shot at the height of the War of Independence. The story of a disposed Irish gentleman and his love for the Colleen Bawn made a plea for better understanding between Catholics and Protestants.

From 1922, film-making in Ireland became a regular business as more ambitious projects went into production. In 1924 John Hurley directed Mícheál Mac Liammóir in *Land of Her Fathers* with Phyllis Wakely, Frank Hugh O'Donnell and members of the Abbey Company. The film was made by the Hepworth Company in Enniskerry and Killarney and was shot by one of D. W. Griffith's cameramen. The last print of the film was stolen in New York and was never recovered.

The following year the Jessie Lasky Company filmed exteriors for *Irish Luck* in Killarney. This company, which included Cecil B. DeMille and Samuel Goldwyn amongst its directors, was one of the leading film companies in the world. That same year I. G. Eppel made *Irish Destiny*, a love story set against the background of the Troubles and featuring the burning of the Customs House. Exteriors were shot in Glendalough and Greystones, Co Wicklow and interiors in Shepherd's Bush Film Studio in London. The stars were Denis O'Dea, Una Shiels and Maureen Delaney. The professionals were paid £6 per day and the amateurs in the cast received half that amount.

In 1929 Lt Colonel Victor Haddick from Limerick produced another film about Saint Patrick. It was *Ireland – Rough-Hewn Destiny* with Gearóid Ó Lochlín, an Irish-speaking actor, playing the saint. Later that year the Muintir Vitagraph Company made *Bunny Blarneyed*, the story of a girl's suitor who forces her father's consent by hanging him over the Blarney Stone. The film starred John Bunny and was directed by Larry Trimble.

Some years after Frank O'Connor's first book of short stories was published



A scene from *Guests of the Nation* directed by Denis Johnston.

in 1931, the playwright, Denis Johnston, made the title story, *Guests of the Nation*, into a silent film. He used actors mainly associated with Dublin's Gate Theatre, including Barry Fitzgerald, Shelagh Richards and Esther Cunningham. Set in 1921, the film depicts the relationship between two captured British soldiers and their IRA captors. When the British authorities refused to trade prisoners, the IRA men reluctantly execute the two soldiers. This was Johnston's first venture into film-making and thereafter he was to concentrate mainly on playwrighting.