

Film Review – *Brief Encounter* – Littleham Village Hall – Saturday 4th November 2008 at 1930

Last night was good, there was lots of bonhomie but mixed feelings about the film amongst a healthy turnout of villagers and visitors. For at least one person, it was very significant, as she saw it first when it was premiered in London at a time in her life when, romantically, things were trying. For others, me included, it was a very interesting reflection of a respected film maker's perspective on life in the middle classes in the mid 20th century (David Lean - later to make *Ryan's Daughter* and *Dr Zhivago* amongst many others). The choice of Rachmaninoff's beautiful second piano concerto as the incidental music was a stroke of brilliance and for me it was the element of the evening that exuded the pinnacle of artistic excellence.

It was also interesting to take a nostalgic peek at the era in which I grew up - it all looked very familiar.

The women's dresses, with coat hangers in the shoulders. Women, wonderful in their humble housewifely roles. Afraid to smoke in public and being kept by stiff upper lipped chaps who called them "old Gel" and gave them a hearty pat on the back when they were in need of emotional support. Railway station buffet's redolent of grime and coal ash, you could almost smell the steam and smoke. Uniformed railway workers, proud of their station (no pun intended) in life and Medical Doctors who still had time to take tea in the afternoon and go to the "pictures".

I had forgotten just how fast Noel Coward required his actors to speak, it was almost difficult to keep up. He always spoke that way didn't he? So I suppose he passed it on through his writing.

The fundamental message of this film about the temptations of the flesh heavily disguised as romance was played on by Morris our host. He contrived to stop the film for tea and ice cream just at the point where everyone with any red blood in their veins was waiting to see if the heroine would throw caution to the wind and begin her illicit affair or do the "right" thing and go back to hubby. There was a great cacophony of hoots and jeers at this point when the action suddenly stopped. I didn't realise the population of quiet Littleham was so visceral!

After the break, the film resumed with the heroine, now ruled by her carnal lusts, running off to find her beau. At this point there was an even more calamitous roar of approval from the normally discrete Littleham folks. Quite what the world is coming to I do not know. There was even applause! Of course circumstances conspired to separate the lovers pre-coitus and if that wasn't frustrating enough, the story then returned to the romantic theme and we were treated to an emotional roller coaster of a ride as the lover's final moments together were further interrupted and anything like a reasonable good bye was thwarted.

Finally, the heroine failed in her attempt to commit suicide by throwing herself under the "boat train" speeding toward Dover as her erstwhile suitor steamed away to Africa, no doubt bent upon further conquests on board the "SS something or another". But in those days chaps didn't disclose their innermost desires and intentions and Trevor Howard, courtesy of David Lean, didn't either - quite right I say. No so for Celia Johnson, who bared her breast - figuratively speaking of course, throughout the whole of the movie. Thus providing us all with an intimate and revealing view of the goings on in the mind of the female of the species. Revelations that were confused, conflicting, sometimes unclear, always introverted, generally untidy and often incomplete - but always right. Nothing changes does it?

Sir Lorn Stakes

Littleham Sunday, October 5, 2008