



**Film stars in
1930s Britain: a
study in
modernity and
femininity**

Annette Kuhn

a.f.kuhn@qmul.ac.uk



Robert Donat (1905-1958)

Films include:

The Private Life of Henry VIII (1933)

The Thirty-nine Steps (1936)

The Ghost Goes West (1935)

The Citadel (1938)

Goodbye Mr Chips (1939)

“



”

LB: I used to think Robert Donat was absolutely fantastic. And I can remember...going to see *Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. And coming home, coming all the way home in the car, crying at it.....

BP: Course there was another reason for that, wasn't there? Everybody knew Robert Donat was dying.

Lois Basnett and Bert Partington

“



”

They were obviously very, very well done these films, extremely well made and acted.... They were very effective to pass for what it pretended to be, there's no way you could fault that.

Tom Walsh

“ ”



And he made his name eventually in *Goodbye Mr Chips*, the definitive version....It's been done since, but he was superb.

Denis Houlston

“ ”



But eh, that was a lovely film, *The Citadel*. With Robert Donat. Aw, that was wonderful.... With eh, where he's a teacher [*Goodbye Mr Chips*]. It was so sweet, and so sad.

Rosalind Avadis

“ ”

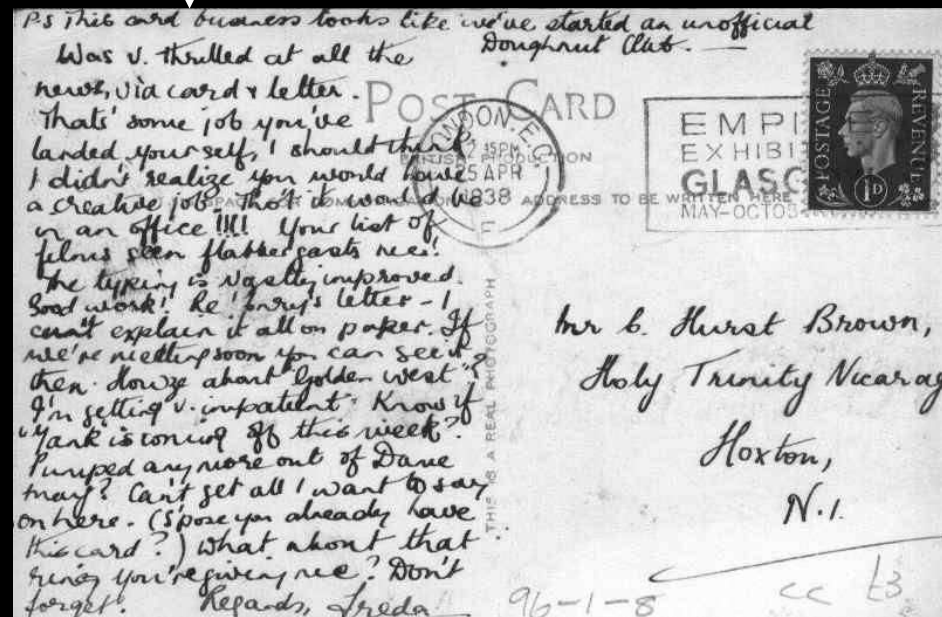


[My sister] had a thing on em, Robert Donat. And she saw *Ghost Goes West* about four times.

Bernard Letchet



‘This card business looks like we’ve started an unofficial Doughnut club’



“ ”



He was one of those who, apart from being a handsome man, he had a beautiful voice.... He really did have a beautiful voice.

Denis Houlston



Ronald Colman (1891-1958)

Films include:

Raffles (1930)

Arrowsmith (1931)

Tale of Two Cities (1935)

Lost Horizon (1937)

Prisoner of Zenda (1937)

“



”

He was nice, weren't they? Ronald Colman. He had a lovely voice.

Hazel Pickess

He had this lovely voice and he was quite good looking but he was so little. Little chap, you know.

Olga Scowan

Ronald Colman was definitely a heartthrob.

Gwen Curnick



Jessie Matthews (1907-1981)

Films include:

The Good Companions (1933)

Evergreen (1934)

First A Girl (1935)

It's Love Again (1936)

Head Over Heels (1937)

“



”

She was a marvellous singer....although she wasn't one of my favourites because I couldn't stand her appalling English accent, she had a terribly wawwy [makes sound] but it wasn't so bad when she sang because you couldn't get the accent then. But she was a good singer.

Norman MacDonald

“



”

She was quite a, quite a talented lassie, she could sing and dance.... But she apparently took elocution lessons...and she spoke with this fancy, fancy accent which was utterly, utterly! Phoney.

Tom Walsh

“



”

Jessie Matthews, I mean she looked as though she was dancing with two wooden legs but when we really thought that she went over the ceiling it was fantastic.

Molly Stevenson

“



”

I never saw anyone in English films who was such a good dancer as Jessie Matthews.

Rachel Tarsky

“



”

I liked Jessie Matthews. She was ever so [posh voice] ever so, frightfully nice, you know. She used a terrible accent.

Bernard Letchet

She could dance. And sing. And she adopted this very posh accent.

Beatrice Cooper

“



English films were a dead loss. They were class-ridden. They were cardboard characters in which the hero and the heroines talked with ‘jawries in their mooth’ accents, you know they talked upper Oxford accents.... The class was through it and Jessie Matthews, Jessie Matthews epitomised all that was class-ridden.

Tom Walsh

“



”

Jessie Matthews, Jessie Matthews epitomised to me all that was class-ridden. Now I've since discovered that...Jessie Matthews was a kind of low grade Cockney.

Tom Walsh

“ ”



I liked her all right, it was just she was a bit of a husband stealer.

Rachel Tarsky

“



”

I can remember once, walking along the High Street. She was walking along on the other side of the road. Just in an ordinary skirt and white blouse. And somebody said to me ‘You know who that is? That’s Jessie Matthews’. And I said, ‘Well, you wouldn’t know her outdoors, would you?’ She just went along as any ordinary person.

May Godden

“



”

Jessie Matthews made one or two musicals. They were never up to the scratch of Busby Berkeley.

Jim Godbold

I never was a Jessie Matthews fan either. See they were all British.

Helen Smeaton

“

”

We'd a few good [stars] here like....
but...you could go on and on and on over
there [Hollywood].

Jimmy Murray

FC: I think if they were any good they
finished up in America anyway. Making
American films. [....]

GC: I think we only really had the dregs
here. There was a lot more happening
out there and if they made a name for
themselves in this country, the next move
was to America.

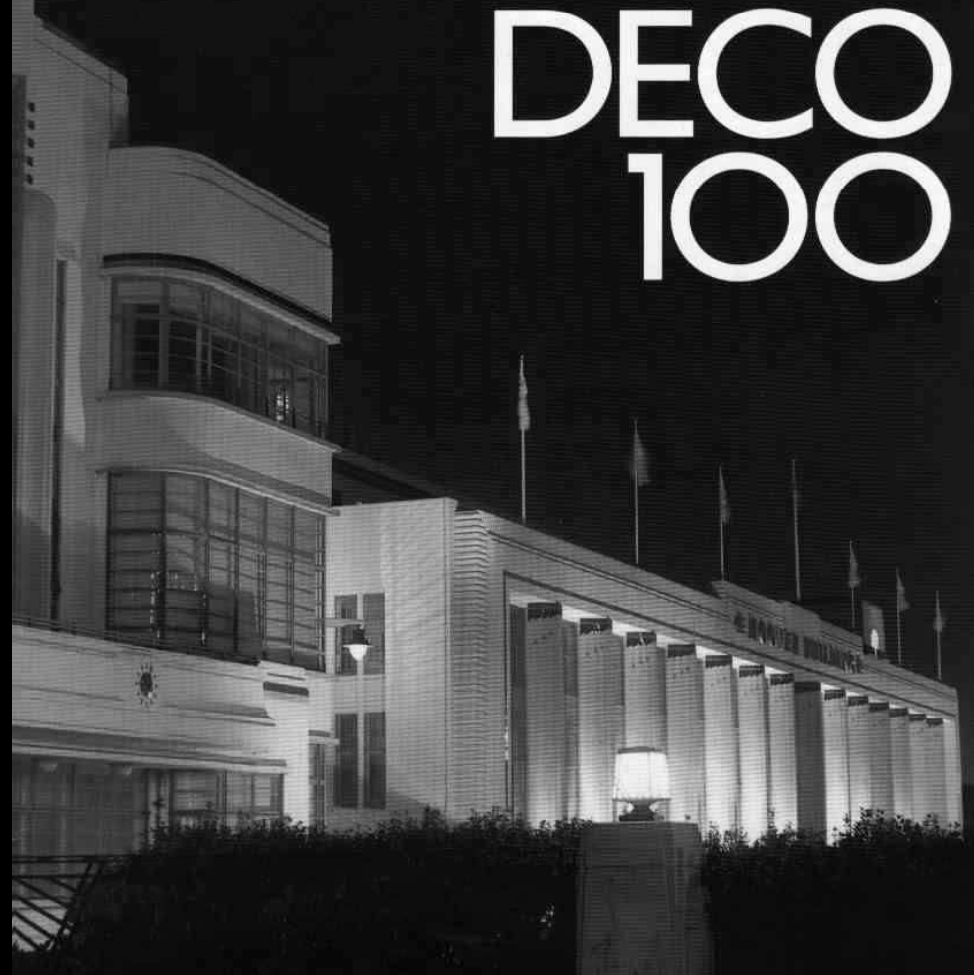
Fred and Gwen Curnick

TimeOut
London

In association with the
V&A

The definitive guide to London's
best Art Deco experiences

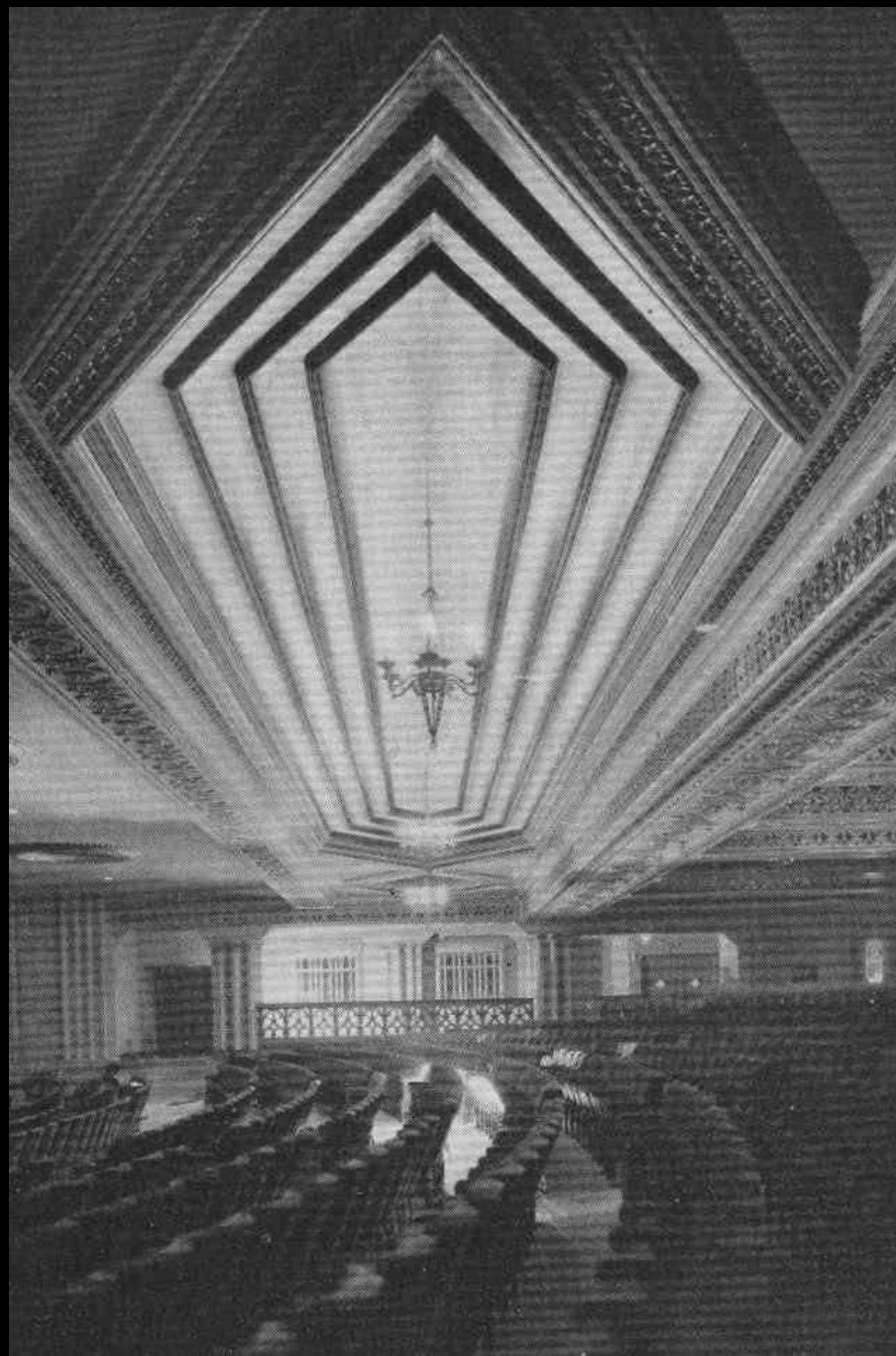
DECO 100



Hoover Factory, Perivale, London



Odeon Cinema, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham



Granada Cinema, Tooting, London

“ ”

But I did like to see the Americans because they, well they got so much money. Or apparently, according to the films, you know. The women were always dressed in furs and fancy hats and em, lived in lovely homes and got refrigerators.

Olga Scowen



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