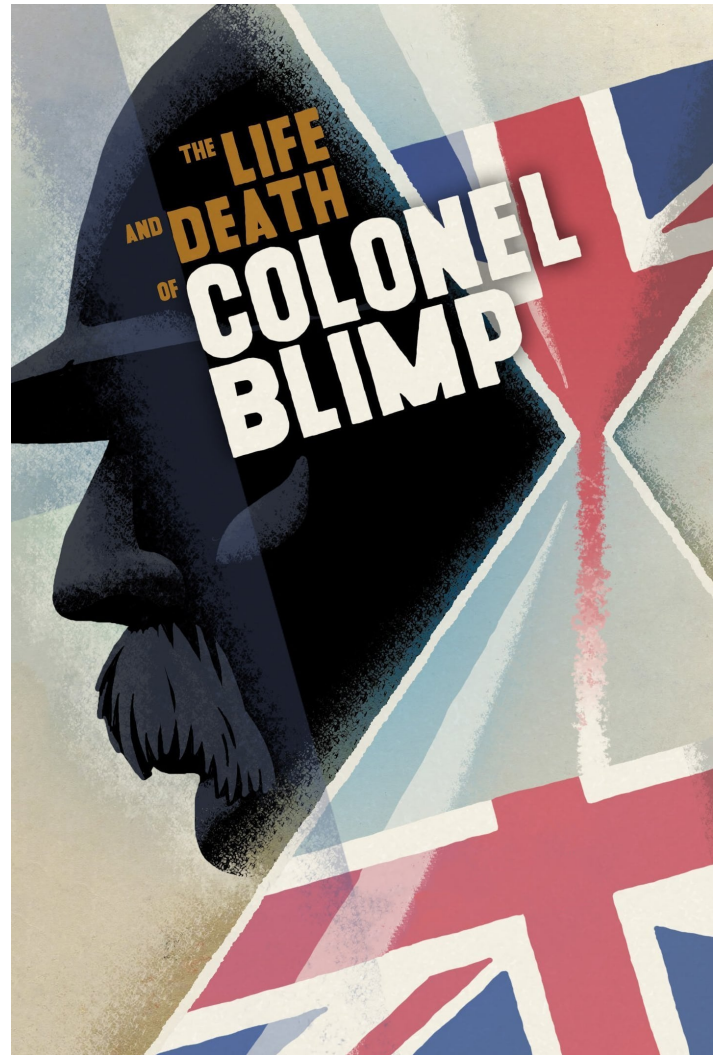
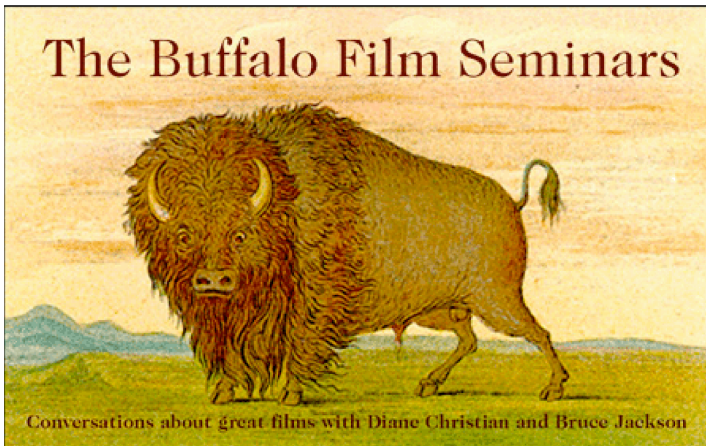


February 11, 2020 (XL:3) Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger:

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP (1943, 163m)

*The version of this Goldenrod Handout sent out in our Monday mailing, and the one online, has hot links.
Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.*



DIRECTORS Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger
WRITING Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger
PRODUCERS Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger
MUSIC Allan Gray
CINEMATOGRAPHY Georges Périnal
TECHNICOLOR CAMERMEN: Jack Cardiff, Harold Haysom, Geoffrey Unsworth
EDITING John Seabourne Sr.

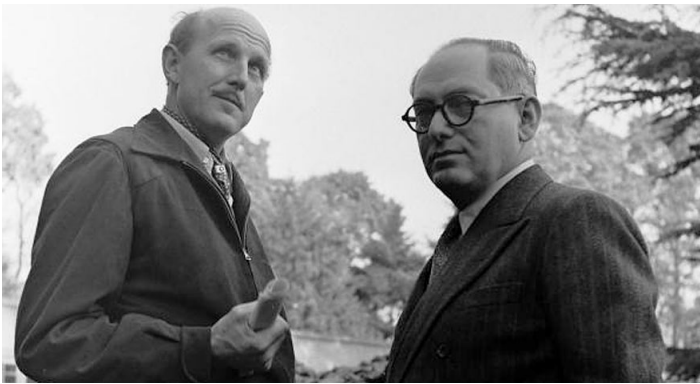
CAST

James McKechnie...Spud Wilson
Neville Mapp...Stuffy Graves
Vincent Holman...Club Porter (1942)
Roger Livesey ...Clive Candy
David Hutcheson...Hoppy
Spencer Trevor...Period Blimp
Roland Culver ...Colonel Betteridge
James Knight...Club Porter (1902)
Deborah Kerr...Edith Hunter / Barbara Wynne / Angela 'Johnny' Cannon
Dennis Arundell...Café Orchestra Leader
David Ward...Kaunitz
Jan Van Loewen...Indignant Citizen
Valentine Dyall...von Schönborn
Carl Jaffe...von Reumann (as Carl Jaffé)
Albert Lieven...von Ritter
Eric Maturin...Colonel Goodhead
Frith Banbury...Baby-Face Fitzroy
Robert Harris...Embassy Secretary
Arthur Wontner...Embassy Counsellor
Theodore Zichy...Colonel Borg (as Count Zichy)
Anton Walbrook...Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff
Jane Millican...Nurse Erna
Ursula Jeans...Frau von Kalteneck
Phyllis Morris...Pebble
Muriel Aked...Aunt Margaret
John Laurie...Murdoch
Reginald Tate...van Zijl

W.H. Barrett...The Texan (as Capt. W.H. Barrett U.S. Army)
Thomas Palmer...The Sergeant (as Corp. Thomas Palmer U.S. Army)
Yvonne Andre ...The Nun (as Yvonne Andrée)
Marjorie Gresley...The Matron
Felix Aylmer...The Bishop
Helen Debroy Summers...Mrs. Wynne (as Helen Debroy)
Norman Pierce...Mr. Wynne
Harry Welchman...Major Davies
A.E. Matthews...President of Tribunal
Edward Cooper...B.B.C. Official
Joan Swinstead...Secretary

MICHAEL POWELL (b. September 30, 1905 in Kent, England—d. February 19, 1990, age 84, in Gloucestershire, England) was nominated with Emeric Pressburger for an Oscar in 1943 for Best Writing, Original Screenplay for *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942). He was nominated for the 1959 Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or for *Luna de*

miel (1959) and in 1951, also at Cannes, was nominated for the Grand Prize of the Festival for *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), which he shared with Emeric Pressburger. Mr. Powell also won the Venice Film Festival Career Golden Lion in 1982. He has directed 60 films including, *The Boy Who Turned Yellow* (1972), *Age of Consent* (1969), *They're a Weird Mob* (1966), *The Queen's Guards* (1961), *Peeping Tom* (1960), *Honeymoon* (1959), *Night Ambush* (1957), *Pursuit of the Graf Spee* (1956), *The Wild Heart* (1952), *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), *The Fighting Pimpernel* (1950), *Gone to Earth* (1950), *Hour of Glory* (1949), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *'I Know Where I'm Going!'* (1945), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942), *49th Parallel* (1941), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), *Blackout* (1940), *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), *The Edge of the World* (1937), *Someday* (1935), *Something Always Happens* (1934), *C.O.D.* (1932), *Hotel Splendide* (1932) and *My Friend the King* (1932).



EMERIC PRESSBURGER (b. December 5, 1902 in Miskolc, AustriaHungary [now Hungary] —d. February 5, 1988, age 85, in Saxstead, Suffolk, England) won the 1943 Oscar for Best Writing, Original Story for *49th Parallel* (1941) and was nominated the same year for the Best Screenplay for *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942) which he shared with Michael Powell and *49th Parallel* (1941) which he shared with Rodney Ackland. Pressburger was also nominated for a 1949 Oscar for Best Writing, Motion Picture Story for *The Red Shoes* (1948). He has directed 17 films including *Night Ambush* (1957), *Pursuit of the Graf Spee* (1956), *Oh... Rosalinda!!* (1955), *Twice Upon a Time* (1954), *The Wild Heart* (1952), *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), *The Fighting Pimpernel* (1950), *Gone to Earth* (1950), *Hour of Glory* (1949), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *Black Narcissus* (1947), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *'I Know Where I'm Going!'* (1945), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *The Volunteer* (1944, Short), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (1942).

ROGER LIVESEY (b. 25 June 1906, Barry, Wales—d. 5 February 1976, Watford, Hertfordshire, England), who appeared as lead and character actor in 34 films, began his career on the stage in 1917. He acted in everything from Shakespeare to modern comedies, in the West End from 1920-1926 and touring the West Indies and South Africa before joining Old Vic/Sadler's Wells company in 1932. He first appeared in film in 1921 in *The Four Feathers*; his second film was in *East Lynne on the Western Front* a decade later. He began doing regular film work in 1934 with *Midshipman Easy* and *Lorna Doone*. He was chosen by Michael Powell to play the lead in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943); the film's New York showing established his international reputation as a notable character actor. He continued to act on stage and film from 1935 until 1969. Some of his other films were *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Hamlet* (1969), *Oedipus the King* (1968), and *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* (1965). He also appeared in *Of Human Bondage* (1964), *The Entertainer* (1960), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), and *Rembrandt* (1936).

DEBORAH KERR (b. September 30, 1921, Helensburgh, Scotland—d. October 16, 2007, Botesdale, United Kingdom) acted in 54 theatrical and television films. Biography from Leonard Maltin's *Movie Encyclopedia*: "Perhaps the screen epitome of ladylike British reserve, this beautiful star was Oscar-nominated a whopping six times in 12 years-and never once won. Yet few film performers have accumulated as many meritorious movies to their credit. A former ballet dancer who also acted on stage before making her screen debut opposite Rex Harrison and Wendy Hiller in Shaw's *Major Barbara* (1941), Kerr achieved stardom early in her career. British director Michael Powell gave the actress one of her best roles, that of a Catholic nun trying to run a mission school in the Himalayas, in *Black Narcissus* (1946), and it brought her to the attention of MGM, which signed her up immediately. (The promotion for her first Hollywood movie instructed Americans thusly: "Deborah Kerr-rhymes with Star!") Although her dominant screen "image" is that of an elegant, refined and possibly reserved British woman, Kerr played a wide variety of roles, and went decidedly against type as the American adulteress in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), in which she shared a famous smooch in the surf with Burt Lancaster. She was a charming—if unusual—match for Clark Gable in *The Hucksters* (1947, her Hollywood debut), a plucky heroine in *King Solomon's Mines* (1950), a credible Lygia in *Quo Vadis?* (1951), an effective Portia in *Julius Caesar* (1953), an utterly unflappable Anna in *The King and I* (1956, with Marni Nixon providing her singing voice), an elegantly witty woman who shares a shipboard romance with Cary Grant in *An Affair to Remember* (1957), a shipwrecked nun

forced to contend with the scruffy marine Robert Mitchum in *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957), the real-life Sheilah Graham, in love with F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Beloved Infidel* (1959), a governess haunted by her surroundings in *The Innocents* (1961), to name just a few. She never gave a bad performance. She was Oscar-nominated for *Edward, My Son* (1949), *From Here to Eternity* (1953), *The King and I* (1956), *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* (1957), *Separate Tables* (1958), and *The Sundowners* (1960). She [...] lived for many years in Switzerland with her husband, author Peter Viertel, occasionally agreeing to make a TV movie or miniseries. In 1994 she received an honorary Academy Award.”



ANTON WALBROOK (b. 19 November 1900, Vienna—d. 9 August 1967, Garatschhausen, Germany). Bio from Leonard Maltin’s *Film Encyclopedia*: “It is difficult to conjure up the memory of this distinguished-looking Austrian actor without seeing Lermontov, the tyrannical ballet impresario obsessed by his ballerina in Powell and Pressburger’s *The Red Shoes* (1948), one of the screen’s unforgettable masterpieces. Walbrook’s stern, chiseled countenance made him a natural to play suave continentals, some of whom barely concealed latent cruelty or lust; even his sympathetic characters often seemed cold and aloof. Born into a family of circus clowns, he broke with long-standing tradition and left the sawdust behind to act on the stage. He played bits in a few silent films during the 1920s, but came into his own during the 1930s with starring roles in *Viktor und Viktoria* and *Waltz Time* in Vienna (both 1933), *Maskerade* (1934) [...] and *The Student of Prague* (1935), among others. In 1936 he played Jules Verne’s Michael Strogoff in a lavish, multinational production purchased for American release by RKO’s Pandro Berman, who brought Walbrook to Hollywood to reshoot dialogue sequences with an English-speaking cast. The final product, seamlessly assembled, was released as *The Soldier and the Lady* (1937); it is a seldom-seen, underappreciated film. Walbrook, eschewing his native country to avoid the increasing Nazi menace, settled in England, where he played Prince Albert to Anna Neagle’s Queen Victoria in

Victoria the Great (1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938). By this time his command of the English language was considerable, and he was extremely effective as the husband in *Gaslight* (1940), a concert pianist in *Dangerous Moonlight* (1941, which introduced the “Warsaw Concerto”), a German-speaking Canadian settler in *49th Parallel* (1941, aka *The Invaders*), Roger Livesey’s adversary in *The Life and Times of Colonel Blimp* (1943), and a Czech resistance leader in *The Man From Morocco* (1944). In the years following his *Red Shoes* triumph, Walbrook appeared in Max Ophüls’ *La Ronde* (1950, as the master of ceremonies) and *Lola Montes* (1955, as the King of Bavaria), as well as *Vienna Waltzes* (1951), *On Trial* (1953), *Saint Joan* (1957), and *I Accuse!* (1958).”

VALENTINE DYALL (b. May 7, 1908 in London, England, UK—d. June 24, 1985 (age 77) in Haywards Heath, West Sussex, England, UK) acted in 126 films and television series, such as: *The Missing Mil* (1942), *The Avengers* (1942), *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *Yellow Canary* (1943), *Henry V* (1944), *I Know Where I’m Going!* (1945), *Brief Encounter* (1945), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945), *Night Boat to Dublin* (1946), *The Ghost of Rashmon Hall* (1948), *The Glass Mountain* (1949), *Man on the Run* (1949), *Christopher Columbus* (1949), *Vengeance Is Mine* (1949), *Helter Skelter* (1949), *Stranger at My Door* (1950), *Ivanhoe* (1952), *Knights of the Round Table* (1953), *Johnny on the Spot* (1954), *Spike Milligan: A Series of Unrelated Incidents at Current Market Value* (TV Movie) (1961), *The Haunting* (1963), *Room at the Bottom* (TV Series) (1964), *First Men in the Moon* (1964), *Mogul* (TV Series) (1966), *The Night of the Generals* (1967), *Casino Royale* (1967), *Oedipus the King* (1968), *The Avengers* (TV Series) (1968), *Oh in Colour* (TV Series) (1970), *Lust for a Vampire* (1971), *The Beast Must Die* (1974), *Come Play with Me* (1977), *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (TV Series) (1981), *Blackadder* (TV Series) (1983), and *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* (TV Movie) (1984).

DAVID ALEXANDER CECIL LOW (7 April 1891–19 September 1963) was a New Zealand [political cartoonist](#) and [caricaturist](#) who lived and worked in the United Kingdom for many years. Low was a self-taught [cartoonist](#). Born in [New Zealand](#), he worked in his native country before migrating to Sydney in 1911, and ultimately to London (1919), where he made his career and earned fame for his [Colonel Blimp](#) depictions and his merciless [satirising](#) of the personalities and policies of [German](#) dictator [Adolf Hitler](#), [Italian](#) dictator [Benito Mussolini](#), Soviet dictator [Joseph Stalin](#), and other leaders of his times.

Low was born and educated in New Zealand. His first work was published when he was only 11 years old.

His professional career began at [The Canterbury Times](#) in 1910. The following year he moved to Australia and worked for [The Bulletin](#). His work attracted the attention of [Henry Cadbury](#), the part owner of [The Star](#), and Low moved to London in 1919, working for that paper until 1927, when he moved to the [Evening Standard](#). There he produced his most famous work, chronicling the rise of fascism in the 1930s, the policy of [Appeasement](#), and the conflict of [World War II](#). His stinging depictions of Hitler and Mussolini led to his work being banned in Italy and Germany, and his being named in [The Black Book](#).



from Emeric Pressburger *The Life and Death of a Screenwriter*. Kevin Macdonald. Faber & Faber. London 1994

C.A. Lejeune, a contemporaneous reviewer for The Observer, called *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* “possibly the most controversial film produced in this country during our entire screen history.”

The film was not distributed in the USA until after the war, when it was handled by United Artists. The distributors foresaw difficulties selling the long, narratively complex film to the American public and launched a publicity campaign trying to sell it as a ribald tale of a lusty old soldier.... What is more, they cut the film by somewhere between 30 and 60 minutes. The result was a court case. The Archers persuaded Rank to sue Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford, owners of United Artists, for ‘misrepresentation’. ...Although the suit against UA was successful, it did not prevent others from taking similar liberties with the picture. *Blimp*’s history is ignominiously littered with drastic edits. For forty years it was impossible to see the film as its makers had envisaged it. Even in Britain, Rank was soon issuing a two-hour version. The complex flashback structure was the first thing to go. Only in 1983 did the British Film Institute restore the film to its uncut glory. Two years later it enjoyed a successful reissue in London and elsewhere. The critics were startled that

such a masterpiece should be almost unknown to them. It was hailed as ‘the greatest British film’. In America the respected critic Andrew Sarris called it ‘the British *Citizen Kane*’, adding that he preferred it to Welles’ film ‘for its deeper understanding of women.’

Blimp is a rarity: a film that has hardly dated. But why is it still so watchable? Perhaps it is the unique combination of humanity and caricature, of satire and tender relationships, conviction and comedy, of realism and fantasy, of warfare and jaunty, ironic music. It is a movie packed with ambivalence. As one critic wrote recently: ‘It’s almost impossible to define this 1943 masterpiece by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. It was ostensibly based on a cartoon series that satirized the British military class, yet its attitude toward the main character is one of affection, respect, and sometimes awe; it was intended as a propaganda film, yet Churchill wanted to suppress it; it has the romantic sweep of a grand love story, yet none of the romantic relationships it presents is truly fulfilled.’

Mark Dugid, “Fantastic Life,” from bfi online

If Twentieth Century cinema is characterised as a battle between ‘realism’ and fantasy, then Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, at least after 1943, allied themselves with the forces of fantasy. In this respect, they found themselves at odds with almost the entire British cinematic tradition, which helps to explain why their work largely fell out of favour with British critics until a National Film Theatre retrospective played a key role in reviving their reputation in 1978.

Like Alfred Hitchcock, Powell cut his teeth on silent films, and he carried into the sound era a strong sense of visual storytelling. Powell, too, eventually found himself in Hollywood, though some forty years later and on rather different terms. Born in Bekesbourne, near Canterbury, Kent on 30 September 1905,

Powell served his apprenticeship with arch stylists Rex Ingram and Harry Lachman before graduating, via still photography on Hitchcock’s *Champagne* (1928) and *Blackmail* (1929), to directing a number of so-called ‘quota quickies’ - small-scaled, medium length films designed to help cinemas meet their legal obligations to show a proportion of British material.

Pressburger, born 5 December 1902, Mikolc, Hungary, was almost penniless when a published short story brought him into the German film industry as a scriptwriter, working on early productions by Robert Siodmak and Max Ophüls. He arrived in England in 1935, having fled Germany for France following the Nazis’ rise to power in 1933. In 1938, he joined the Hungarian coterie of Alexander Korda, and like his compatriots he had much to invest in the dream of England as an outpost against tyranny and beacon of decency in a Europe turning to

fascism. It was Korda too, who 'discovered' Powell, after his first substantial work, *The Edge of the World* (1937), and partnered the two for *Spy in Black* in 1939.

The duo spent the early part of the war making inspiring propaganda films, notably *49th Parallel* (1941) for which Pressburger won an Oscar, although Powell's collaboration on the spectacular fantasy *Thief of Bagdad*, released in 1940, was an indication of their later direction. In 1942 they established their own production company, The Archers, with its distinctive target logo, and thereafter their films carried the label "Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger". It was all but unprecedented for a director to share credit in this way.

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943), a domestic success despite earning the displeasure of Churchill (who tried to ban it) marked the beginning of Powell and Pressburger's departure from realist orthodoxy, with its non-linear chronology and its use of the same actress—Deborah Kerr—to play the three women in the life of its hero. They went further with its follow-up, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), which imbued the Kent countryside with an almost pagan mysticism in its tale of three modern pilgrims pursuing a haphazard path to spiritual awakening. The film was their first flop, and an early sign that they couldn't depend on carrying either critics, audiences or industry along with their most ambitious explorations. Moreover, in its central conceit, the hunt for the 'glue man', a bizarre character who puts glue in young women's hair to deter them from fraternising with American troops, it sowed the seeds of the critical hostility that would emerge following Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960).

In a similarly mystical vein was their second, and Powell's third, trip to the Scottish islands (following *Edge of the World* and *Spy in Black*), *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), a strange love story with supernatural overtones. Undeterred by the failure of critics and audiences to appreciate their increasingly individual vision, Powell and Pressburger turned an assignment from the Ministry of Information to make a film to further Anglo-American relations into their most extravagant fantasy yet.

Memorably contrasting a monochrome afterlife with a real world of radiant technicolor, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) was a feast of cinematic invention, from the appearance of a camera obscura to the celebrated moving stairway to Heaven, to the closing of the huge

eyelids as David Niven's romantic pilot succumbed to anaesthesia.

The pair continued to explore this new terrain of fantasy and their next film, *Black Narcissus* (1947), further estranged them from the British cinema establishment. Rebuilding a Himalayan palace on a Pinewood sound stage, the film was a sustained erotic tour-de-force detailing the conflicts of a group of English nuns beset by a

hostile environment and an unruly local population, and featuring an extraordinary scene-stealing performance from the virtually unknown Kathleen Byron.

The ballet extravaganza *The Red Shoes* (1948) was a deceptively simple tale of a young dancer torn between love and her career, based on a story by Hans Christian Anderson. The film's centrepiece was a seventeen-minute ballet which is still perhaps the most

concentrated imaginative sequence in British films.

The Red Shoes was a high-water mark for Powell and Pressburger. They found themselves at odds with the industry, falling out first with Rank, then with Korda. They continued to make interesting films—*The Small Back Room* (1949) was an unexpectedly straight thriller, albeit with touches of fantasy, while *Gone to Earth* (1950) was a visually sumptuous, if flawed, rural melodrama. *Tales of Hoffman* (1951) attempted, with some success, to recapture the magic of *The Red Shoes*, and contained some stunning sequences; a further musical, *Oh... Rosalinda!!* was less satisfying.

By 1957 the two were pulling in different directions, and the partnership came to an end. In 1960, Powell scandalised critics with *Peeping Tom*, an intense study of a voyeuristic killer - a film cameraman who photographs his victims as they die by the sharpened leg of his tripod - portrayed with disquieting sympathy by young Austrian actor Carl Boehm. It was a highly sophisticated film, but despite being released in the same year as Hitchcock's *Psycho*—and arguably a better film—it was too much for a Britain yet to leave behind the conservatism of the 1950s, and it attracted universal condemnation, not least for a sequence in which Powell himself played the killer's father, with his own son playing the boy.

The backlash was such that much of The Archers' earlier work from *A Canterbury Tale* onwards was damned retrospectively for its supposed 'morbidity'. The film all but ended Powell's career: he managed to make a few more films, including two more with Pressburger, then languished in obscurity until Francis Coppola invited him



to become 'director in residence' at his Zoetrope studios in the early 1980s. By the time of his death in 1990, however, *Peeping Tom* had been recognised as a masterpiece: as Powell ruefully commented in his autobiography, "I make a film that nobody wants to see and then, thirty years later, everybody has either seen it or wants to see it".

Despite their separation, Powell and Pressburger remained friends until the latter's death in 1988. Theirs was a truly complementary partnership: Powell was English through and through, but with an international spirit and an imagination which owed nothing to English reticence; Pressburger brought the insights of an outsider, and had a delight in the language and culture of his adopted home. Powell had a rich visual sense; Pressburger wrote dialogue crackling with wit and energy. Powell was exuberant and confident; Pressburger shy, but with a fierce intelligence. Above all, they were both tireless and inventive storytellers.

Powell's own favourite of their films, *A Matter of Life and Death*, struck a chord with a British public starved for fantasy and romance in the immediate aftermath of war. But the Archers' films became too rich for British palates; audiences preferred American escapism, while the British film industry was more comfortable with smaller, realist pictures than the baroque—and costly—experiments of Powell and Pressburger. They left behind a set of films unlike anything seen before or since in the British cinema - at least five masterpieces among them—and a sense of what is possible in film that will continue to inspire well into the medium's second century.

a Pressburger take on movie magic:

"I think that a film should have a good story, a clear story, and it should have if possible, something which is probably the most difficult thing - it should have a little bit of magic ... Magic being untouchable and very difficult to cast, you can't deal with it at all. You can only try to prepare some nests, hoping that a little bit of magic will slide into them."



from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger. Ed. & w/ an Introduction by Ian Christie, Faber & Faber, London

1994

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp has had a career that would be unusual for any film, and must be unique in the history of British cinema. Conceived at the height of World War II, when film industries throughout the world were producing either escapist entertainment or rousing propaganda—and often trying to combine these in the same film, with varying degrees of success—*Blimp* dared to raise awkward questions in a puzzling form: questions about the calibre of Britain's military leadership and about its readiness for 'total war'; about the history of German militarism and how this differed from Nazism. Worst of all, perhaps, from a contemporary standpoint, the only military action it showed was either ironic or downright ignoble.

'What is it really about?' demanded a contemporary critic, with an exasperation which valuably reminds us that this now-acclaimed film was and remains something of a conundrum. For a work based on a biting satirical conception, it proved remarkably benign, not to say romantic, about the English ruling caste. And for all its length and decades spanned, we learn remarkably little about either Britain's or Germany's public history between 1900 and 1940. At a time when not only films but all kinds of public expression were required to be clear and positive in their meaning, *Blimp's* greatest sin was to be open to different interpretations; to hint (as the same critic acutely judged) 'that it has something much bigger to say.' ...

The makers of *Blimp* did indeed feel they had something to say' and knew that they had to find an original form. They had no previous experience of working in colour (then considered as much a new frontier as sound had been a decade earlier) and very little dealing with history. Innocent, more or less, of the conventions of such films, they set about creating 'a crazy quilt of Technicolor'. The result, to their astonishment, ran almost three hours—an inadvertent epic.

In many ways it was to be the most personal film that Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger would ever make. Personal, in the sense that they patched onto it so much of their own differing histories, making of its broad, simple story an allegory of their own improbable partnership in wartime Britain, as well as a thoughtful contribution to the armoury of wartime propaganda. Powell has described his own Edwardian English childhood in the richly evocative early part of *A Life in Movies*; and Kevin Macdonald's forthcoming biography of Pressburger will greatly extend our understanding of how closely Pressburger drew on his immigrant's experience, first of Germany and then of Britain, to create Theo's pivotal 'point of view'.

Because it grew from Powell and Pressburger's own experience and concerns—the anecdotal starting point was a scene (eventually cut) in *One of Our Aircraft is*

Missing in which an old crew member reminds his young comrades that he too was young once—the storm of controversy may well have come as a surprise to them. It should not have. From the point at which David Low's 'Colonel Blimp' became the armature for their project, it could have been anticipated that this would attract hostility.

Low's iconoclastic cartoon character was described in his *Times* obituary as 'a rotund, bald, fierce gentleman who formed the mouthpiece for the most reactionary opinions'. Running in Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* throughout the 30s, the Colonel was a scourge of establishment hypocrisy and self-interest. After the early reverses of the war, he had become a hotly contested symbol in the debate on Britain's ability to withstand the Axis. The parliamentary debate of February 1942 which promised a new coordination of the war effort turned on Stafford Cripps's claim that: 'From now on we have said good-bye to "Blimpery".'...

In the same year Robert Graves published an essay, 'Colonel Blimp's Ancestors', prompted by 'the uncomfortable feeling that the British Army contained far too many pig-headed officers, leftovers from the First World War'. Little wonder that the new Secretary of State for War, James Grigg, showed so little sympathy for Powell and Pressburger's project. The terms in which he wrote to Churchill, about its potential to 'give the *Blimp* conception of the Army officer a new lease of life at a time when it is dying from inanition', shows how sensitive officialdom was to the mere mention of Blimp.

All the more so, perhaps, because it seemed to many that Churchill himself embodied 'positive' Blimpish qualities.

To Powell and Pressburger, it seemed obvious that Blimpism was by no means wholly negative. On to Low's swingeing satire, they had grafted other values: steadfastness, loyalty, gallantry, honour, hospitality.

Priding themselves on their up-to-date grasp of propaganda techniques, it seemed obvious to The Archers that, having anatomized the menace of Nazism in *49th Parallel* and celebrated the value of resistance under occupation in *One of Our Aircraft*, they should next commemorate the 'death' of Blimperry, by showing its embodiment literally defeated by the 'new army', even as he tries to cling on to the last vestiges of power in the Home Guard. A kind of 'how we fight', after their versions

of 'why we fight'; and something of a *mea culpa* for the years of appeasement.

The extent to which they underestimated official 'Blimpery' became clear when Cabinet papers of the period were opened in the 70s. They show how Churchill took a close personal interest in trying first to have the

film, halted and then to obstruct its export....

There is, perhaps, a glancing parallel to be drawn with the Soviet attitude to cinema under Stalin. Film was in some sense 'real' for Stalin, as the director Grigori Kozintsev discovered at the Kremlin screening, which helps explain Stalin's obsessive desire to control what appeared and did not appear on Soviet screens, including his own portrayal

by a series of actors. Churchill seems to have had a similar belief in the magical 'reality' of film.... We do not know his detailed reaction to the actual film, except that it was negative. But there is an account of his visit to Anton Walbrook's theatre dressing room, when the latter was appearing in *Watch on the Rhine* at the time of *Blimp*'s premiere. According to a friend of Walbrook's, the Prime Minister stormed into the actor's dressing room at the interval and demanded: 'What's this film supposed to mean? I suppose you regard it as good propaganda for Britain?' Churchill was apparently far from mollified by Walbrook's answer, that he thought 'no people in the world other than the English would have had the courage, in the midst of war to tell the people such unvarnished truth.'...

We can hear the same justification that Powell and Pressburger used both during and after the film's stormy passage. For them, the theme was obvious:

Englishmen are by nature conservative, insular, unsuspicious, believers in good sportsmanship and anxious to believe the best of other people. These attractive virtues, which are, we hope, unchanging, become absolute vices unless allied to a realistic acceptance of things as they are, modern Europe and in Total War.

[from Powell's letter to Grigg, Secretary of State for War]

What gives the theme filmic force and originality in *Blimp* is the conception of a triple role played by the same actress. In a device which anticipates the theatrical disguises of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, we are seduced into sharing Clive's fantasy of an 'eternal recurrence'.



Like in the films of Ophuls (with whom Pressburger worked at the outset of both their careers), from *La Signorina de tutti* to *Lola Montes*, the Archers' work offers a close engagement between the material and the means of narration. The dramatic shape and structure of the film clearly underpin its main theme. So, while circular repetition has an ironic or tragic connotation in Ophuls, here it serves to focus our attention as much on what is not being shown as on what is.

[Letter of Michael Powell to Wendy Hiller (who was to have the female lead but got pregnant and would be replaced by Deborah Kerr. He seems to have written the same letter to Deborah Kerr when he was recruiting her.)]

Dear Wendy,

We have decided on 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp' and I am going to try to explain how we arrived at the decision so that you can share our thoughts and plans directly as you would if you were here to contribute to them.

I must, first of all, because we still don't know one another well, reaffirm our responsibility as independent film makers.

One, we owe allegiance to nobody except the financial interests which provide our money; and to them, the sole responsibility of ensuring them a profit, not a loss.

Two, every single foot in our films is our own responsibility and nobody else's. We refuse to be guided or coerced by any influence but our own judgment.

Three, when we start work on a new idea we must be a year ahead, not only of competitors, but also of the times. A real film, from idea to universal release, takes a year/ Or more.

Four, no artist believes in escapism. And we secretly believe that no audience does. We have proved, at any rate, that they will pay to see truth, for other reasons than her nakedness.

Five, at any time, and particularly at the present, the self-respect of all collaborators, from star to prop-man, is sustained, or diminished, by the theme and purpose of the film they are working on. They will fight or intrigue to work on a subject they feel is urgent and contemporary, and fight equally hard to avoid working on a trivial or pointless subject. And we agree with them and want the best workmen with us; and get them. These are the main things we believe in. They have brought us an unbroken record of success and a unique position. Without the one, of course, we should not enjoy the other very long. We are under no illusions. We know we are surrounded by hungry sharks. But you have no idea what fun it is surf-bathing, if you have only paddled, with a nurse holding on to the back of your rompers. We hope you will come on in, the water's fine.

Emeric first had the idea of 'Colonel Blimp' last September. It sprang from a scene...no longer in the final edition. Let us show, he said, that Blimps are made, not born. Let us show that their aversion to any form of change springs from the very qualities which have made them invaluable in action; that their lives, so full of activity, are equally full of frustration. We will show his youth and his youthful dreams; and we will show, through his eyes, the youth of today: the changing world of the last forty years through the eyes of one unchanging man; a man who has fought in three wars with honour and distinction and has not the slightest idea what any of them were really about; a man, who, in his youth, fumblingly puts one woman on a pedestal; and when she jumps off into another man's arms, is always trying to fill the vacant niche with women of the same size and shape. A comic, a pathetic, a controversial character. We went to see Low, his godfather and biographer. At first puzzled, then amused, finally enthusiastic, he promised his support...

The development of the characters became the important thing, the love-story of the three women, the completion of their circle of development (Emeric has a beautiful scheme for this), the relation of the young officer at the beginning of the film to events at the end, his relation to the third of the women, and a dozen fascinating problems which are rapidly being solved.



from The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp. A.L. Kennedy BFI London 1997

It's a film about desires repressed in favour of worthless and unsatisfying ideals. And it's a film about how England dreamt of itself as a nation and how this dream disguised inadequacy and brutality in the clothes of honour.

Perhaps of all the Powell and Pressburger creations, *Blimp* came closest to reaching the unreachable and catching it in the spaces between its words. It is almost insanely bent upon dealing with the most delicate,

intangible and subjective elements of time and character. This is a film about loss and longing, about creating the impossible and then setting it beyond your grasp. This is a film about home and the meaning of home, the meaning of self. This is a film which lies in the most human ways but tells remarkable, human truths. Here, to quote from Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*, 'time passes by, love passes by, life passes by', in a way which is more poignant and savagely forgiving, more melancholy, troubling and revealing, than almost any other cinematic work I have encountered.

To begin with Clive means that I must begin with Roger Livesey; not the first choice for the title role and paid significantly less than the other two leads. Originally, Laurence Olivier was meant to play Clive and he was enthusiastic about his involvement, although the letters from him on his interpretation of the Colonel suggest that it might have been a mildly cataclysmic influence on the film. Olivier's coldly visible intelligence and black edge would have toppled the script into the realms of heavy-handed satire, while his personal dash could have made the romantic plotline either ludicrous or too minor to have any meaning.

Roger Livesey, on the other hand, was and still is ideal. *Blimp* gave him arguably his finest hour as a screen actor, and without him the Clive Candy we know today would be almost unthinkable. Livesey gave the two dimensions of Low's cartoon and the beautiful psychology of Pressburger's script a three-dimensional presence of bluff charm and unassuming grace.

It is a matter of record that Churchill loathed *Blimp* with a passion remarkable for a man who was Prime Minister of a country at war and presumably somewhat pressed for time. 'Pray propose to me the measures necessary to stop this foolish production before it gets any further. I am not prepared to allow propaganda detrimental to the morale of the Army, and I am sure the Cabinet will take all necessary action. Who are the people behind it?'

Pressburger knew Walbrook from their Ufa days in Germany. At that time Imre Pressburger had changed his name to the Germanic Emerich Pressburger and Walbrook was still Adolf Wohlbruck, a respected screen actor. Half-Jewish, a homosexual and a man of conscience, Walbrook was vehemently anti-Nazi. By 1939 he was establishing himself as an English-speaking actor in Britain. ... Pressburger put all his experience as an outcast [he was classed as an enemy alien throughout the production of *Blimp*], a refugee and a lover of impossible homes into the mouth of Theo, as played by another refugee. Theo is sensitive, cultured, intelligent, and irredeemably sad. Walbrook makes him hypnotic, vulnerable, subtle, and

elegant. His voice is light, measured, still coloured with Walbrook's Austrian accent, and carries a constant undercurrent of emotion. His movements are filled with a tender restraint. If the bluff, dogged Yorkshireman Livesey can stand for Michael Powell, then the quiet, wise Viennese Walbrook stands for Pressburger in an onscreen commemoration of their remarkable friendship.

Taken as individuals, people are equally complex and contradictory, but they can be regarded with forgiveness and compassion much more easily. Compassion is the key to the presentation of all Pressburger's characters. He said of them himself, referring to *The Unholy Passion*, one of his novels, 'As happens so often in life, none of the characters is really bad...they all have their reasons.'

Theo longs for a place in the world and for innocence. Clive has too firm a place and a dangerous innocence. Together, the men temper each other. By the end of the film, both of them have lost most of what they have, materially, but each has come much closer to carrying within himself the life, hope, and dignity that would be worth fighting for.

Their individual victories are set against a finale which is deeply ambivalent.



Roger Ebert: "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp"

One of the many miracles of "The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp" is the way the movie transforms a blustering, pigheaded caricature into one of the most loved of all movie characters. Colonel Blimp began life in a series of famous British cartoons by David Low, who represented him as an overstuffed blowhard. The movie looks past the fat, bald military man with the walrus moustache, and sees inside, to an idealist and a romantic. To know him is to love him.

Made in 1942 at the height of the Nazi threat to Great Britain, [Michael Powell](#) and Emerich Pressburger's work is an uncommonly civilized film about war and

soldier—and rarer still, a film that defends the old against the young. Its hero is a blustering old windbag Clive Wynne-Candy, a war-horse of the Army since the Boer War, now twice retired from regular duty and relegated to leading the Home Guard.

As the film opens, the general has ordered military training exercises and announced, "War starts at midnight." A gung-ho young lieutenant decides that modern warfare doesn't play by the rules, and jumps the gun, leading his men into the General's London club and arresting him in the steam room. When Wynne-Candy bellows, "You bloody young fool--war starts at midnight!" the lieutenant observes that the Nazis do not observe gentleman's agreements, and insults the old man's belly and mustache.

Wynne-Candy is outraged. "You laugh at my big belly but you don't know how I got it! You laugh at my mustache but you don't know why I grew it!" He punches the young lieutenant, wrestles him into a swimming pool--and then, in a flashback of grace and wit, the camera pans along the surface of the water until, at the other end, young Clive Candy emerges. He is thin and without a mustache, and it is 1902.

"The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp" has four story threads. It mourns the passing of a time when professional soldiers observed a code of honor. It argues to the young that the old were young once, too, and contain within them all that the young know, and more. It marks the General's lonely romantic passage through life, in which he seeks the double of the first woman he loved. And it records a friendship between a British officer and a German officer, which spans the crucial years from 1902 to 1942.

This is an audacious enough story idea to begin with, but even more daring in 1942, when London was bombed nightly and the Nazis seemed to be winning the war. Powell at first wanted [Laurence Olivier](#) to play his title role, but the screenplay ran into fierce opposition from Winston Churchill, and the Ministry of War refused to release Olivier from military duty. Then Powell cast Roger Livesay, a young actor who had worked for him before,

and as the German officer, an emigre Austrian actor named [Anton Walbrook](#).

Despite this sober undercurrent, "Colonel Blimp" is above all a comedy of manners, and Powell and his writing and producing partner Pressburger conduct it with style and humor. Jolly music underlines an opening sequence in which motorcycle messengers distribute news of the war games, and there is wit in the movie's ingenious flashbacks and flash-forwards. Photographed by Georges Perinal with help from [Jack Cardiff](#), the movie is one of the best-looking Technicolor productions ever made, its palate controlled to make wise use of bright contrasts in a world of subdued harmony.

Several scenes surprise us by how they pay off. Note the early duel between the British and German officers (they do not even know one another; the German was drawn by lot to respond to an insult to the German army). A high-angle shot refuses to take sides, the Swedish referee scuttles back and forth like a crab--and then, just when we expect to see the outcome, the camera cranes up to an exterior shot of the Army gymnasium (a model), with snow falling on Berlin. The message is made visually: The season of traditional values is ending, and these soldiers will not again play so fair.



In hospital, Clive Candy and his opponent, Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff, are visited by Candy's British friend, Edith Hunter ([Deborah Kerr](#)). The German falls in love with her and proposes marriage. Candy is at first delighted, but as he returns home he realizes he loved her, too, and begins a lifelong search for a substitute. Fifteen years later, in a World War One hospital, he sees a young nurse

who is Edith's spitting image, and arranges a dance for war nurses just to meet her again. This is Barbara Wynne, again played by Deborah Kerr. Note the dinner scene when Candy explains his motive for seeking her out, and the subtle chill with which Barbara says she quite understands. The marriage fades out like the duel did, as if there is nothing else worth saying.

Kerr appears a third time as a working-class girl named Angela Cannon, who is Wynne-Candy's driver

during the Second World War. It is a remarkable performance by the 20-year-old newcomer, playing three roles; [Wendy Hiller](#) was originally cast, but became pregnant, and Powell cast Kerr both because he thought "she would be a star one day," and because he was falling in love with her.

The friendship between Clive and Theo is traced for 40 years. They meet again at a German prisoner's camp in England, after World War One; Theo ignores Clive and stalks away, but the next day calls to apologize, and is a guest at a dinner of British establishment types at which, gentlemen all, they assure him his homeland will be rebuilt: "Europe needs a healthy Germany!" When the two men meet again, it is after the German has fled his homeland in 1939. In a long speech all done in one take, he explains why he has chosen England over his birthplace. Walbrook's acting here is sublime with its mastery of tone and mood, and this speech, more than any other, explains why Churchill was wrong to oppose the film.

The most poignant passages involve the general growing older. He looks like a caricature to younger officers—with his beefy face, pink complexion, mustache (grown to hide the dueling scar) and raspy voice. But in his heart he is still young, still in love, still idealistic. At the end of the movie he looks at a water pool in the basement of his bombed-out house, and is reminded of a lake across which he once pledged love. And he insists to himself that it is the same lake, and he is the same man. Rarely does a film give us such a nuanced view of the whole span of a man's life. It is said that the child is father to the man. "Colonel Blimp" makes poetry out of what the old know but the young do not guess: The man contains both the father, and the child.



The Home Guard (Wikipedia)

The **Home Guard** (initially **Local Defence Volunteers** or **LDV**) was an armed citizen militia supporting the [British Army during the Second World War](#). Operational from 1940 to 1944, the Home Guard had 1.5 million local volunteers otherwise ineligible for military service, such as those who were too young or too old to join the regular [armed services](#) (regular military service was restricted to those aged 18 to 41) or those in [reserved occupations](#). Excluding those already in the armed services, the civilian police or civil defence, approximately one in five men were volunteers. Their role was to act as a secondary defence force in case of [invasion](#) by the forces of [Nazi Germany](#) and other [Axis powers](#).

The Home Guard were to try to slow down the advance of the enemy even by a few hours to give the regular troops time to regroup. They were also to defend key communication points and factories in rear areas against possible capture by paratroops or [fifth columnists](#). A key purpose was to maintain control of the civilian population in the event of an invasion, to forestall panic and to prevent communication routes from being blocked by refugees to free the regular forces to fight the Germans. The Home Guard continued to man roadblocks and guard the coastal areas of the United Kingdom and other important places such as airfields, factories and explosives stores until late 1944, when they were stood down. They were finally disbanded on 31 December 1945, eight months after Germany's surrender.

Men aged 17 to 65 years could join although the upper-age limit was not strictly enforced. Service was unpaid but gave a chance for older or inexperienced soldiers to support the war effort.

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS SPRING 2020, SERIES 40

- Feb 18 Billy Wilder *Sunset Boulevard* 1950
- Feb 25 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Wages of Fear* 1953
- Mar 3 Luchino Visconti, *The Leopard* 1963
- Mar 10 Masaki Kobayashi *Kwaidan* 1965
- Mar 24 John Schlesinger *Midnight Cowboy* 1969
- Mar 31 Alan Pakula *Klute* 1971
- Apr 7 Robert Altman *McCabe and Mrs Miller* 1971
- Apr 14 Martin Scorsese *King of Comedy* 1983
- Apr 21 Wim Wenders *Land of Plenty* 2004
- Apr 28 Wes Anderson *Isle of Dogs* 2018
- May 5 Pedro Almodóvar *Pain and Glory* 2019

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