

A SHORT HISTORY OF BRANDON AND...

THE 'FIRST OFFENCE'

Mr H.G. Foster is staying at the White Hart Hotel, on Brandon's High Street, for a couple of nights. However, in the cold crisp night air, on Friday 1st November 1935, he sits in an open top convertible car, a rather sporty model, outside that hotel, facing the town's old bridge. On the bridge a small crowd has gathered. Foster sits patiently. Then, all of a sudden, he jumps to life. His foot presses hard down on the accelerator, kicking life into his car. The car roars forward. Within seconds the car is hurtling toward the crowd on the bridge. The crowd sees the headlights looming quickly toward them. Yet, they do not move. In fact, some of them can barely hide their excitement. The car still comes at them, getting uncomfortably close. They stand firm. They know the car is not coming onto the bridge. A fact that Foster knows too. He turns the steering wheel to the right and drives down toward the river. The crowd can now see Foster has a passenger in the seat next to him. A second later there is thud and Foster's car is airborne. The car looks like it may clear the river and embed itself in the side of the Maltings, but instead comes down among reeds just shy of the building. Foster then ducks down under the steering wheel. Apart from the sound of the river lapping around the car all is now quiet. A signal is given, injecting life into the crowd and they erupt in huge applause.

It must be said, Foster has not lost the plot, in fact, he is a key part of it. The plot, being a movie scene that is being filmed. A scene he will receive no recognition for, because his work is largely anonymous. You see, Foster is a movie stunt man, part of a group known as the 'Chrysler stunt men', with this latest work being for a movie that will be titled 'First Offence', but for now its working title is 'Bad Blood'. The movie company cannot afford for its main actor, John Mills to be injured, so Foster gets paid to take the risk, a risk that is controlled. Foster was also part of a team who set up the ramp by the river to project his car over the water. However, they did not expect it to go so spectacularly well and he is thankful to not hit the wall of the Maltings. He is also thankful when a rowing boat pulls up alongside the car to take him back to the river bank, where he can then return to the White Hart Hotel, to get dry and warmed up. His 'passenger', a dummy wearing a blonde wig, is also removed from the scene.

The following night, the two main stars, John Mills and Lilli Palmer, appear by the river, with Mills finding time to shake hands with some of the locals. Both are rowed out to sit in the half-submerged car. They film a scene to appear they were in the car when it entered the river, thus evading police motor cyclist who are chasing them. The motor cyclists are filmed riding across the bridge. When all filming is concluded the actors return to the White Hart too. The next day, all film crew are gone and the car is extracted from the river and sent to Towler's garage on London Road.

Compared to today's movies that require months of post-production, the release for First Offence was very quick. Its first viewing was in February 1936, at a trade event in London's Hippodrome. Its general release was in July that year, with Brandon's Avenue cinema showing it for three days from Thursday 2nd July.

Additional information.

Sir John Mills CBE was an English actor who appeared in more than 120 films in a career spanning seven decades. He excelled on camera as an appealing British everyman who often portrayed guileless, wounded war heroes. Wikipedia

Born: 22 February 1908, Watts Naval School

Died: 23 April 2005, Denham

Spouse: Mary Hayley Bell (m. 1941–2005), Aileen Raymond (m. 1932–1941)

Children: Hayley Mills, Juliet Mills, Jonathan Mills

Height: 1.73 m

Grandchildren: Crispian Mills, Melissa Caulfield, Sean Caulfield, Jason Lawson

Awards: Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role.

(Sourced from Google)

Lilli Palmer was a German actress and writer. After beginning her career in British films in the 1930s, she would later transition to major Hollywood productions, earning a Golden Globe Award nomination for her performance in *But Not for Me*. Wikipedia

Born: 24 May 1914, Poznań, Poland

Died: 27 January 1986, Los Angeles, California, United States

Spouse: Carlos Thompson (m. 1957–1986), Rex Harrison (m. 1943–1957)

Children: Carey Harrison

Full name: Lilli Marie Peiser

Grandchildren: Chiara Harrison, Faith Harrison, Sam Harrison, Rosie Harrison

(Sourced from Google)