

Cambrian Centre film show: The Huggetts. Thursday 15th November.

Review.

The Huggetts came: where were the rest of us? I realize that having turned 77 and been long abandoned by the world of work gives me a perfect excuse to forget the chores and shopping for a couple of hours and turn up to a free film show. It was so enjoyable that I want to try to persuade anyone who, reading this, admits to having thought about going along and then thought better of it, that they have missed a treat.

Hands up who remembers the Huggetts! No, I don't either but that this 1948 Gainsborough Films feature was one of three is a sufficient testimony to their popularity. The story, set in an upper-lower-class London suburb, takes place in 1947, with the wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip as its background highlight. Such a splash of heart warming colour and ceremonial had long been missed in post-war Britain.

Never having shouted myself hoarse at the elbow of a London 'Bobby', I was stirred and rather touched by the Huggetts' decision to join many hundreds of people in camping out between the Mall and Buckingham Palace for the privilege of waving at and cheering the Royal couple personally. It is actually Grandma Huggett (Amy Veness) who insists on being taken to the event and whose need to spend a penny at just the wrong moment leads finally to a fracas between Mr. Huggett (Jack Warner) and a belligerent front-liner, ensuring that the family misses seeing the procession altogether.

But this is not their sole misadventure. A cloud of trouble is stirred up by the arrival of a niece whose mother (Dandy Nichols) is in hospital - not, as expected, a schoolgirl like two of the Huggett daughters, but a busty, pouting siren in the shape of the (pre-blonde) Diana Dors. When Jack Warner persuades his boss to give Diana a job, her behaviour almost costs him his own and results in his car being involved in a crash. But the film ends happily enough, with eldest daughter Jane (Jane Hylton) marrying her fiancé Jack (Jimmy Hanley), just demobbed from the RAF.

Jack Warner and Kathleen Harrison carry the film staunchly as the Huggett mum and dad. (It must be many years since any wife and mother habitually addressed her husband as 'Dad' and 'Father', or since 'Dad' laid down the law so peremptorily to wife and children.) Petula Clark as a younger daughter is, naturally, given spots for vocalising. There are laughs in good measure - especially those supplied by the incident of having a telephone installed for the first time, while the family tensions and crises increasingly engage one's sympathies. The whole movie is a gold-mine of authentic late-'Forties attitudes and atmosphere. The Huggetts' house, its wallpaper, unsophisticated lighting and functional architecture - even the hen-coop in the back yard, not to mention what passed for fashionable 'wear' flaunting itself in the local pub, bring back the far-yesterdays of my generation and are worth pages of social history to younger ones. Few would wish to return to such a period; but I refuse to sit in judgement on it.

I don't know what the other Huggett films are like, but my point is to thank Mary McDonald and her team for giving me a chance to meet them.

Previously, three illustrated talks on local history and Richmond Park gave another sort of pleasure.

Bryan Robson.