

## O LUCKY MAN? INVESTIGATING THE LINDSAY ANDERSON ARCHIVE

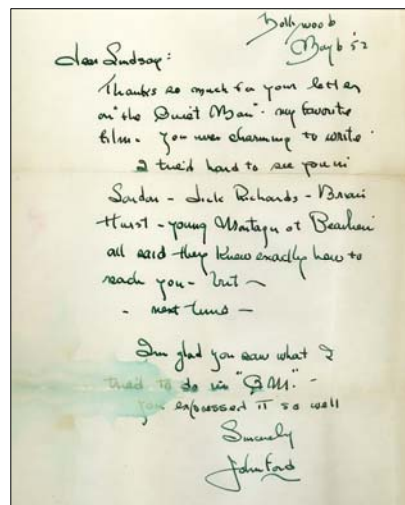
**Karl Magee, University of Stirling**

In 1992 Lindsay Anderson made his final film, *Is That All There Is?*, a TV film for BBC Scotland which follows a day in the life of the world-weary director. In one scene Anderson rummages through a table covered with scrapbooks and files of cuttings of reviews he wrote for a variety of publications over the years and wonders ‘Do you think anyone is going to be interested in all this?’ Well, here at Stirling we certainly are and our project team have put Anderson’s personal and working papers to good use as we enter the final year of our three year AHRC project examining ‘The Cinema Authorship of Lindsay Anderson.’



*Anderson consulting his archives in Is That All There Is?*

*Is That All There Is?* provides a fascinating document for the archivist as it shows Anderson’s archive in its original context. As the camera follows Anderson around his London home it takes in the cinema posters on the walls, the books and video tapes on the shelves and the filing cabinets in his office. In the scene where he reviews some of his old cuttings he picks out a review of *The Quiet Man* he wrote in 1952 and notes that John Ford sent him a nice letter about it – a letter which now forms part of the archive held in Stirling.<sup>1</sup>



*Letter from John Ford to Lindsay Anderson (6 May 1952)*

In 1948 Lindsay Anderson, aged 25, wrote in his diary that:

“Some people sky-rocket to fame and accomplishment, but I know I am not one of these. I am not the sort of person to achieve celebrity much before forty.”<sup>2</sup>

In terms of his filmmaking career this prediction was amazingly accurate. Anderson spent much of the 1950s developing his filmmaking skills, gaining valuable experience directing short films and documentaries. It was not until 1962, aged 39, that Anderson made his first feature film, *This Sporting Life*.

Anderson is perhaps best known as the director of *This Sporting Life* and *If...* but the 6 feature films that Anderson directed are, however, just one aspect of his career:

- As well as documentaries and short films he directed over 100 commercials in the 1960s and 70s and a number of pop videos in the 1980s
- He began as a film critic, co-founding the influential film journal *Sequence* while still a student at Oxford University in 1947 and continued to contribute articles on cinema to journals, magazines and newspapers throughout his life
- He was the author of a number of books about cinema: *Secret People* – a detailed account of the production of *Secret People*, a British film directed by Thorold Dickinson (in 1953); and *About John Ford* (1981)
- He also had a long and distinguished career as a theatre director, directing his first play at the Royal Court in 1957 and having a long partnership with David Storey (directing 9 of his plays).
- He had a high media profile often appearing on TV and radio and was regularly invited to film festivals all over the world to attend retrospectives of his work and speak about cinema

All of these varied aspects of his career are reflected in his archive.

In August 1994 Anderson died suddenly while on holiday in France, aged 71. With no immediate family, Anderson’s close circle of friends, colleagues and relations converged on his London flat to sort out his affairs. His secretary of many years, Kathy Burke, recalled the scene in a letter to David Sherwin, the writer of a number of Anderson’s films:

“Many of Lindsay’s friends rallied around and were very supportive. We had to organise his memorial celebration and the flat had to be cleared, a mammoth task as Lindsay rarely threw anything away.

The last fortnight was extraordinary. People were coming and going all the time. Representatives from the Cinema Museum and the Theatre Museum were introduced to each other as they came to collect their bequests, stretching to shake hands over the expert from Fitzjohns Books who was sorting out books crouched on the hall floor. Dr Sean Lewis and John Cartwright from the British Council, who had offered us some space to store files and papers, popped in to see what they were letting themselves in for. The furniture went

off to Phillips to be auctioned, including my desk, so thereafter I operated from a card table.”<sup>3</sup>

The collection arrived in Stirling in 2001 in several hundred cardboard boxes. Funding was secured for the initial cataloguing of the collection in 2003 – this task was made slightly easier because Anderson had employed a secretary for many years and much of the material was arranged in working files (an arrangement which we retained).

The collection has now been re-boxed in archival quality, acid-free, boxes and folders and consists of:

- 150 archive boxes (containing Anderson’s personal and working papers, photos, and memorabilia)
- Over 2,000 of Anderson’s books
- 700 VHS video tapes containing films and TV programmes recorded off TV by Anderson (with a card catalogue created by Anderson recording the contents of the tapes)



A selection of items from the Lindsay Anderson Archive.

I began work on the collection with a general knowledge of Anderson as a filmmaker who made some notable films in the 1960s. However I was unprepared for the wealth and range of material I would find. The boxes which had been packed in London in 1994 were finally being opened and examined almost 10 years later. The summary descriptions on the outside of the boxes didn't hint at the treasures to be found inside.

The collection includes a wealth of correspondence with friends, colleagues, directors, actors, producers, critics and fans. Anderson's friends and colleagues such as Tony Richardson, David Storey, Malcolm McDowell and John Gielgud are well-represented but the collection also includes some letters from unexpected figures such as Kurosawa, who wrote to Anderson in 1969 to congratulate him on winning the Palm d'Or with *If...*

I think my favourite letter in the collection is from the Polish director Andrej Wajda, writing to Anderson about *Britannia Hospital* in 1983:

“Dear Lindsay... I saw *Britannia Hospital* in Paris. It is the most Polish film produced anywhere in the world in recent years. Being Polish, I completely understand the way you are using the facts of contemporary life and putting them on the screen. This really is Britain – the only one that truly exists. As in every Polish masterpiece, there is twice as much material in it as there ought to be. It's as if you were anticipating censorship and counting on it to shape your film by cutting it. Perhaps it's a pity you've no censorship in England.”<sup>4</sup>

The collection is not limited to Anderson's extensive correspondence files. I got rather excited one day when I unwrapped what appeared to be an Oscar but on closer inspection it turned out to be a plastic imitation. Anderson had co-directed an Oscar-winning film in 1954 – the documentary *Thursday's Children*, about a school for deaf children in Margate. However the production company rather than the directors received the statuette. Several weeks after this discovery I came across a letter Anderson wrote to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1973 requesting his Oscar. The Academy's reply was also present – it informed Anderson that they were unable to provide him with an award as “no duplicate statuettes can be issued.”<sup>5</sup>

Now rather than solving the curious case of the plastic Oscar this correspondence led to further questions – why did Anderson decide in 1973 to request an award for a film he had made 20 years earlier? Was he looking for justification / recognition for his work following the mixed reception for *O Lucky Man*? Or did he have a space on his mantelpiece beside the Palm d'Or he had won for *If...* that needed to be filled? After speaking to members of the Lindsay Anderson Memorial Foundation, a group of friends and colleagues who are committed to promoting Anderson's films, I discovered the provenance of the object – it was bought by a friend of Anderson's as a gift following the Academy's refusal to give him the real thing!

Another item I wasn't expecting to find in the boxes was one of Anderson's leather jackets. The leather jacket was part of Anderson's carefully cultivated public image – when he appeared on screen at the end of *O Lucky Man!* he was wearing one. The

jackets were specially made for Anderson in Poland – a country he loved and visited on many occasions.

Now when I found it my initial reaction was to wrap it in acid-free tissue and put it on a shelf in an acid-free box. This was a slightly different reaction to the university's art curator who when I showed her the jacket proceeded to try it on and suggest putting it on display in an exhibition case.

Well, her exuberance triumphed over my caution and in its red velvet-lined case the jacket makes a striking exhibit and forms the centrepiece of an exhibition of material from the collection which has been displayed in the Changing Room Gallery, Stirling, the National Media Museum, Bradford and the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham – it's also part of the exhibition currently on display in the Macrobert.

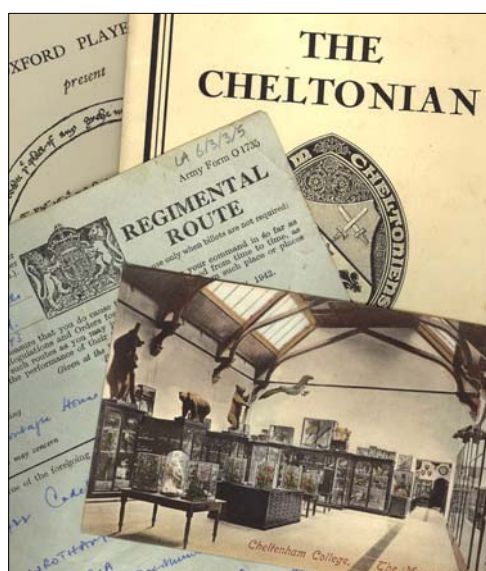


*Material from the Lindsay Anderson Archive on display at the James Hockey Gallery, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham*

As well as the large amount of working papers relating to Anderson's films and theatrical productions which I had expected to find, the collection also includes a large amount of personal material and memorabilia. The material that Anderson kept from his childhood included scrapbooks and albums of film stars of the 1920s and 1930s containing newspaper cuttings and cigarette cards of the stars of the time; and

photographs and memorabilia of a colonial childhood in India. There is also a selection of material from Anderson's schooldays, a period of his life which he drew on when he came to make *If...* in 1968, blending his own experiences of public school into the revolutionary mix.

Anderson attended Cheltenham College, a public school with a strong military tradition which specialised in preparing the sons of officers for the army training colleges at Sandhurst and Woolwich. Coming from a military family the choice of Cheltenham for Lindsay was not surprising. The school prospectus noted that "all boys in the Senior School are instructed in military drill and the use of the rifle... with a view to the special preparation of Boys for the Army" – an aspect of his education that was reflected in the schoolboys military manoeuvres in the film. The discipline enforced in the school is reflected in Anderson's copy of the College Rule book which consisted of 12 pages of rules and regulations governing behaviour and conduct with a fold out map showing the areas of Cheltenham that were out-of-bounds to students.



*Personal memorabilia and photograph of Anderson taken at Cheltenham College in the 1930s.*

Anderson kept a number of souvenirs of his schooldays including postcards of the College, school prospectuses, his school crest and cap, exam certificates, programmes for theatre productions in which he appeared, school notebooks and a run of *The Cheltonian*, the school journal, covering Anderson's time at Cheltenham.

When it came to making *If...* these souvenirs of his schooldays could have provided some useful reminders for Anderson – the rules and regulations, the military tradition, the Speech Day reports in *The Cheltonian* (including the speeches of the Headmaster and distinguished guests). As well as drawing on his own personal collection of memorabilia Anderson also carried out some up-to-date research purchasing a copy of *Eton: how it works* by J. D. R. McConnell in 1967.

In a commentary on the film written by Anderson in 1994 he noted how useful this book had been when it came to shooting the scene where Travis, Johnny and Wallace are called to the headmaster's office after shooting the chaplain during a military exercise. He noted that "it is interesting that a lot of the headmaster's dialogue in that

scene was taken from a book written by an ex-housemaster at Eton, so some of the more idiotic things spoken by the headmaster are real.”<sup>6</sup>

Another surprise when cataloguing the collection came when I discovered a file of material relating to George Michael and Wham! Anderson was invited by Wham’s management to film a documentary of the band’s historic tour of China in 1985 – the first western pop band to play in the communist country. The initial idea was to film a record of this historic event but what transpired was one of the most unlikely collaborations imaginable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was an ill-fated project – Anderson fell and hurt himself while in China and had to direct much of the film from a wheel chair. Wham! and their management weren’t happy with Anderson’s film when they saw it on their return to London. They fired Anderson and brought in another director who made a shorter film which featured far more of Wham! and far less of China – and turned it from a documentary to a pop promo.



*Anderson and Wham! in China, April 1985.*

As well as correspondence, memos and other material relating to this troubled production (including Anderson’s disputes with Wham! and their management after his removal from the film) the collection also includes a copy of Anderson’s version of the film – which has never been publicly screened. Anderson produced a fly-on-the-wall documentary which provides great insights into a China on the verge of great cultural change – very similar in style to the (award-winning) Free Cinema documentaries he made in the 1950s.

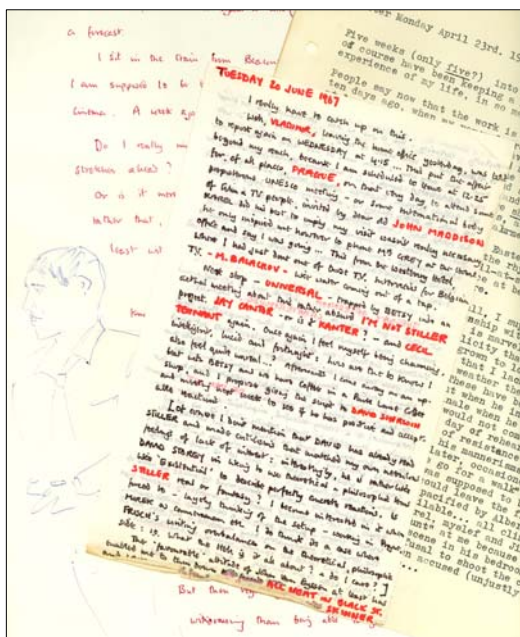
While the Wham! film remains unseen the archive also includes a series of files relating to unmade projects including:

- A version of *Wuthering Heights* starring Richard Harris as Heathcliffe in the 1960s
- An epic Hollywood adventure movie about the British Empire in India and
- a sequel to *If...* - revisiting the main characters 25 years later as they return to the school for a reunion...

In the late 1980s and early 1990s Anderson also attempted to produce a film adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* (a play which he had directed on the stage on a number of occasions). The file for this project includes many letters of rejection including this letter from B Sky B, another one of my favourites, which begins:

“Dear Mr Chekhov... Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding the programme proposal entitled *The Cherry Orchard*. We have now had the opportunity to consider your concept and unfortunately cannot proceed with it owing to the fact that we are operating under financial restrictions at the present moment.”<sup>7</sup>

For a period of fifty years, beginning in 1942, Anderson kept a diary. He recorded his personal thoughts and feelings in a variety of formats with ninety-three separate notebooks, desk diaries and groups of loose pages being used in total. The diaries contain unique reflections on the key events and works of Anderson’s life. The deliberate, careful recording of events by Anderson is shown by the incredibly neat handwriting used throughout.



Anderson's diaries.

He also used capital letters or different coloured ink to highlight people’s names and titles of films, plays and books. This gave Anderson – as it does the later reader – a useful aid when referring back, searching for entries relating to particular subjects. Anderson often looked over earlier entries and occasionally annotated, analysed or corrected them. In later years he also sometimes mentions reading entries written many years earlier and reflects on their contents.

It does not appear that Anderson destroyed any volumes or entries, or censored his own words. Anderson wrote on an irregular basis and there are no entries present for a number of years (including, frustratingly, 1968, the year he made *If...*). However these gaps appear to be down to his having neither the time nor the inclination to write

at certain points in his life. The discovery of the diaries after Anderson's death came as a great surprise to his friends. No-one knew that he kept a diary. In an open house with a steady stream of visitors and guests it was one of Anderson's few private spaces.

The diaries had already been used by an author before the transfer of the collection to Stirling in 2001. In 2000 Gavin Lambert, a close friend of Anderson, published a personal memoir about their friendship which drew heavily on the diaries. In the book, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson*, Lambert described the diaries as a "dark mirror" with "the abrasively unhappy and overly judgemental person who inhabits them reflecting all [of] Lindsay's negatives and few of his positives."<sup>8</sup>

However the "dark mirror" that Lambert describes does, however, shine quite brightly in places. There is much in Anderson's diaries which is lively, amusing and playful. He describes his wartime service in India – where he served with the Intelligence Corps intercepting Japanese communications – in vivid detail. London in the 'swinging sixties' is reflected in the constant stream of premières, events and parties that Anderson attends, and the excesses of the Hollywood machine are recorded by Anderson with growing and satirical incredulity during the time he spent in Los Angeles attempting to make movies in the 1970s. The failure of *Britannia Hospital* in 1982 and the increasing difficulty Anderson had making films in its aftermath is also poignantly recorded.

When reading the diaries it quickly becomes apparent that Anderson was conscious of his creation of a public image that hid a private side few were aware of. He often reviewed his public appearances in his diaries, keen to ensure they conformed to the public persona he created. For example he was pleased with his appearance in a documentary about Humphrey Jennings which he watched in May 1970:

"I am slightly shocked and rather pleased by my own appearance, speaking with great deliberation and (I would say) authority – trenchant and specific in my anti-“Englishness”. Certainly I stick my neck out, and in that company – with the English un-analytical adorers all around – appear very much the disturbing, radical heavy."<sup>9</sup>

It is this contrast between public and private / between image and reality that sparked some of the research questions that our AHRC project aims to address. From the diaries and other personal writings we can see how Anderson saw himself – an auteur committed to personal filmmaking

Anderson's commitment to a truly personal way of filmmaking was a constant element of his career from the Free Cinema manifesto written in 1956, through the Mick Travis trilogy of *If....*, *O Lucky Man!* and *Britannia Hospital*, and on to the missed opportunities and unmade projects of the 1980s and 90s. His diaries provide a fascinating insight into how his personal principles clashed against the realities of commercial cinema.

Anderson was aware that the films he made would never guarantee him the status of a popular, populist British director. In his diary in August 1971 he summed up the kind of director he would like to be:

“I am quite content to be admired by a minority at home, to be resented or ignored by the majority, and to be rather more respected abroad.”<sup>10</sup>

This difficult balancing act of art and commerce was evidently on Anderson’s mind while making OLM. In May 1972 he wrote about what he described as:

“the enormous strain imposed by this attempt to straddle the world of ‘personal’ (auteur if you like) cinema, and that of widespread acceptance as popular and therefore commercial entertainment.”<sup>11</sup>

and concluded that he was not equipped to engage in this struggle.

Anderson’s book collection provides further evidence of this view of his own place in the international filmmaking community.

Anderson’s books have now been catalogued and the collection fills many gaps in the library’s stock of books relating to film and theatre. The books are additionally important because many of them are annotated by Anderson. Of particular interest are Anderson’s comments in the margins on authors and critics views of his films. His copy of Alexander Walker’s book *Hollywood England: The British Film Industry in the 60s* provides a perfect example of these annotations. Summing up his account of British cinema in the 1960s Walker writes:

“Where in the period under review does one look for the British equivalent of Bergman, or Forman, or Rohmer, or Antonioni, or Truffaut or even Godard? The answer is, nowhere.”<sup>12</sup>

In response an exasperated Anderson took out his red pen, underlined the passage and wrote “Thanks!” in the margin.

The playwright David Storey began an article about his friend in *The Guardian* in December 2004 by noting “Lindsay Anderson certainly had a flair – some would say a genius – for making enemies.”<sup>13</sup>

Anderson’s confrontational attitude often invited criticism of both himself and his work – the critical reaction to Anderson’s appearance at the end of *O Lucky Man!*, when he steps into the film to slap Malcolm McDowell across the face with a copy of the script being a good example...

Anderson, however, never took criticism of his work lying down. He was always quick to challenge critics whose opinions about his films he didn’t share and the collection is full of entertaining and enlightening correspondence with various critics who upset and annoyed him.

To go back to David Storey’s statement that Anderson “had a flair for making enemies” I should point out that he continues his article by noting that Anderson had “an even greater flair, if not genius, for making friends and sustaining friendships.”

For those who knew Anderson well he was a loyal and faithful friend. He gave many young actors and directors invaluable help and experience, and his London flat became a refuge for many troubled souls whom Anderson took under his wing and cared for.

The collection also shows he replied to every fan letter or request for advice he received – he often would write long letters full of advice, opinion and gossip to complete strangers who must have been delighted by the replies they received.

A study of the Anderson Archive provides a unique opportunity to re-examine his work through a study of his private thoughts (in his diaries), his public statements (in his correspondence and interviews) and the reception of his work by others. Being an avowedly personal filmmaker Anderson's Archive provides the key to understanding the creative themes and tensions that run through his work and how his commitment to a rigidly personal authorship defined his career.<sup>14</sup>



*Anderson photographed during the making of O Lucky Man!*

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<sup>1</sup> LA 5/1/2/13

<sup>2</sup> LA 6/1/10

<sup>3</sup> Sherwin, David, *Going mad in Hollywood and life with Lindsay Anderson* (London, 1996), pp. 295–296.

<sup>4</sup> LA 1/9/3/16/62

<sup>5</sup> LA 5/1/1/1/4

<sup>6</sup> Ryan, Paul (ed.), *Never Apologise – The collected writings of Lindsay Anderson* (London, 2004), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> LA 5/4/14/12

<sup>8</sup> Lambert, Gavin, *Mainly About Lindsay Anderson* (London, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> LA 6/1/58

<sup>10</sup> LA 6/1/62

<sup>11</sup> LA 6/1/64

<sup>12</sup> Walker, Alexander, *Hollywood England – the British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London, 1974), p. 462.

<sup>13</sup> *The Guardian*, 11 Dec. 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Full details of the Lindsay Anderson Archive can be found at: <http://www.is.stir.ac.uk/libraries/collections/anderson/index.php>