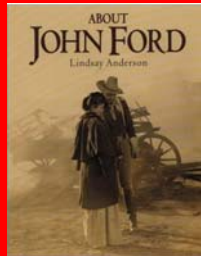


About the John Ford Archive

charles.barr@ucd.ie



Lindsay Anderson's 1983 book *About John Ford* is, for me, the finest thing that he did in any medium, not excluding his direction of *If....* in 1968.¹

Not everyone may agree, but it's indisputable that Ford's work was his major love and inspiration throughout his whole adult life as a critic and film-maker.

Between them, the lives of Ford and Anderson span exactly a century. This virtually coincides with the first hundred years of cinema: from Ford's birth in 1894 to Anderson's death in 1994. And their lives overlap for exactly half of that century, the first 50 years of Anderson's life: from his birth in 1923 to Ford's death in 1973.

Somehow the neatness of those dates reinforces my sense that the relationship of the two men, and of their work, plays out certain things that are central to the development of popular cinema, and to the consumption of it by critics and audiences, in its first hundred years.

For just over half of those overlapping fifty years, the two of them were in touch, on and off, experiencing what Anderson called 'a kind of friendship':

- 1947 first contacts by letter
- 1951 first meeting, in Dublin
- 1957 meetings in London
- 1973 last meeting, in Palm Desert, California.

Anderson did of course write a lot of reviews and articles during Ford's lifetime, but his most weighty tributes, and his lasting testaments to Ford's greatness, come later. In particular, the book in 1983, *About John Ford*, and the two-part programme on Ford that he wrote and presented for the BBC arts series

Omnibus in 1992 – close to the end of his life, and to the end of the first century of cinema as a public medium.²

At the start of *Omnibus* part one, Anderson was able to show some silent footage of himself and Ford together in 1957, shot on black-and-white 16mm film at the National Film Theatre. In his voice-over narration, he introduces his subject thus:

John Ford's was a unique career. It stretched over the whole of American cinema, from Griffith and the early days of silent film, to colour and CinemaScope. He made more than a hundred films, and won more Academy Awards than any other director....

Ford was generally regarded as being almost impossible to interview. He hated to put on an act. And he also hated to put on a public face.³

But despite his casual public image, Ford did leave a very substantial and well organised archive, which has been housed since 1982 in Bloomington, Indiana.⁴ Of course he had staff to organize the archive for him, but he approved, and collaborated, and the raw material he supplied was extraordinarily rich.

I spent a week there in March 2007, researching other topics to do with Ford, but I did take the chance of copying, among other things, the various bits and pieces related to Anderson that I found there. It's one of those American research centres that are enviably well endowed, well resourced, and well staffed, a real pleasure to work in.

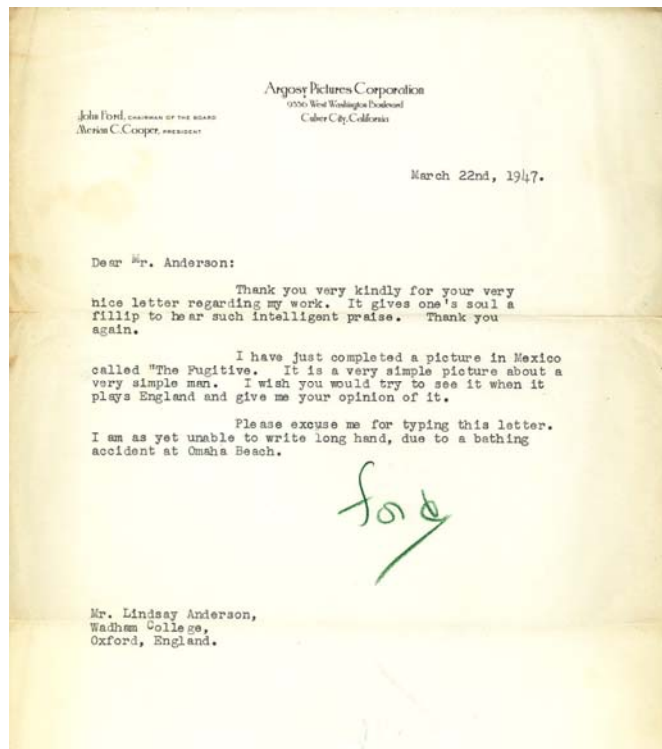
TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [INFORMATION ABOUT THE JOHN FORD PAPERS](#)
- [CORRESPONDENCE](#)
- [SCRIPTS AND PRODUCTION MATERIALS](#)
- [LEGAL MATERIALS](#)
- [MISCELLANEOUS](#)
- [PHOTOGRAPHS AND STILLS](#)
- [OVERSIZE](#)
- [TAPES](#)
- [BOUND VOLUMES](#)
- [FILMS](#)
- [INDEX TO FILM TITLES](#)

In the catalogue of contents, the most interesting material is, as you would expect, in the second and third sections – Correspondence, and Script and Production materials. In both sections, there is a lot that entirely contradicts

Ford's carefully cultivated image as a primitive who worked by instinct and didn't bother much with pre-production work, or with post-production work – that is not true at all. But, in the limitations of this paper, I will focus on correspondence, with Anderson especially. The website lists the correspondents, and Anderson is just one in a formidable roster of around 500 names.

The start of his enchantment with Ford's films was his viewing in England, soon after he returned from war service in India, of *My Darling Clementine*, beautifully recalled on the first page of *About John Ford*. He wrote Ford a fan letter, which as far as I can see does not survive. But the archive here in Stirling has Ford's reply:



So what did Anderson say when he had a chance to see *The Fugitive* a year or so later, and to take up Ford's invitation to 'give me your opinion of it'? In a lengthy letter, nine handwritten pages, he does not hold back on the criticism.⁵

Well, *The Fugitive* has been shown, and I have seen it, and I am taking you at your word and writing to tell you how I liked it. This I find rather difficult, because my reactions were so mixed.

And here is a section from the middle:

I hope, Mr Ford, that this does not seem a 'marking' letter, better not written; and, since I suppose I have written quite outspokenly, I hope it does not seem an impetuous one. I should not, of course, have written if you had not asked me to - nor if I had not so great an admiration for your work. The truth is, I feel that, with *The Fugitive*, you are on the wrong track. What you can do so marvellously is to invest the everyday world with tenderness and poetry. Nichols' adaptation of *The Power and the Glory* is pretentious and hollow - given a straighter, less determinedly 'symbolic' script, you would have made a more wholly satisfactory film. The symbolism should grow out of the material (as the load truck becomes a moving, unforgettable symbol), not be imposed upon it. Look what a lovely film *Clementine* is (I hope you do not find this imitating, as Milton always became infuriated when people praised *Paradise Lost* at the expense of *Paradise Regained*), though the material is the least pretentious possible. I wish you had got Nunnally Johnson to do the adaptation of Graham Greene's novel. (If I may be allowed to say so.)

It is not the sort of letter that Anderson, later on, would ever enjoy getting about his own films. In fact, he would have been positively enraged both by the criticism itself and by the schoolteacherly academic tone of it, lecturing the filmmaker about the principles of symbolism, and about Milton. I hardly need to underline the irony of this, to anyone who is remotely familiar with Anderson and his prickly temperament.

His next letter, less than two months later, starts by wondering impatiently whether Ford can have received his last. Well, Ford *had* got it, otherwise it would not be preserved in the archive, but one can understand him not having rushed to reply. By now, Anderson has seen his next film *Fort Apache*, and he can't resist having a dig at that as well. The letter is handwritten, but does not copy very well, so I have transcribed these lines:

Fort Apache has recently arrived and we went bursting with expectation, but... We have discussed it among ourselves at very great length, wondering what went wrong, and there are many points and questions I would like to put to you about it. But for the moment I will break off, hoping to hear from you, or your secretary, whether you like to discuss your films in this way with remote and critical admirers; or whether circumstances make it impossible for you to indulge in such correspondence.⁶

'we went bursting with expectations, but....' Those are Anderson's dots, not mine (four of them, as he always insisted there should be in the title of *If....*). *Fort Apache* is obviously such a let-down that no more needs to be said, other than 'what went wrong?' – a verdict on this thrilling and complex film that now seems utterly perverse, though Anderson, typically, would never revise his opinion of it. Not surprisingly, Ford did not respond to this either, and for a few years there was no more contact.

I'll pick up the Anderson connection again soon, but will first look quickly at a few other letters, to give a brief sample of the additional riches of Ford's archived correspondence.

There is correspondence with censors, starting with a letter from Joseph Breen on *Stagecoach*, addressed to the producer Walter Wanger but obviously passed on to Ford - here is the start of it:⁷

Dear Mr. Wanger:

We have received and read the script for your proposed picture STAGECOACH, and are happy to report that the story seems to meet the basic requirements of the Production Code.

Going through the script in detail, we call your attention to the following minor items:

We again urgently recommend that you keep down the element of Doctor Boone's drinking and drunkenness to the absolute minimum necessary for plot and characterization. Below, we mention specifically certain scenes of liquor and drinking which might possibly be omitted:

Page 58: Most political censor boards cut scenes of fainting on the part of pregnant women.

Pages 94, 95 and 97: There are gags with liquor and drinking here, which we feel might well be omitted.

Breen will make the same complaint about drinking in the script of *Fort Apache*, using exactly the same form of words, 'keep it to an absolute minimum', and Ford takes equally little notice – at least, it is hard to imagine that there could have been even more drinking in his preferred version of either film than there is the film as released. The second half of the letter worries about the labelling of Dallas, the Claire Trevor character, as a prostitute, and there the censor is a bit more successful.

Sergei Eisenstein writes to Ford from Moscow early in 1946: here is the second half of his letter:⁸


For my own sake please add anything available about your work on "Young Mister Lincoln" (including full script): this is one of the films I like most of all ever seen and my personal contribution to the study about you will be concerned with this masterpiece of yours. (Also details about Tom-
da).

We would also need the script of the "Informer."

In about a month's time we will have in VOKS (that is the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and the U.S.S.R.) a Conference about your work, which is well known and very much appreciated here by all our cinema people here. We will send you the material of this conference and expect you to help us with the research work concerning you.

I hope to hear from you as soon as possible,

and remain cordially yours


(S. Eisenstein)

I have not found Ford's reply, but Eisenstein's deeply appreciative essay on *Young Mr Lincoln* is included in the booklet accompanying the Criterion DVD edition of the film

A different kind of archive document emphasises Ford's Irish affiliations:

ST. PATRICK'S DAY - MARCH 17th, 1955

Luncheon at Valley Tail O' the Cook
12:30, Private room. Shower for "Sister"
Frances Leslie

1	Himself	10	Jane Darwell
2	Frances Leslie	11	Mae Marsh
3	Marcorita Hellman	12	Ruth Clifford
4	Patsy Wise	13	Dorothy Jones
5	Murph McDonald	14	Donald Crisp
6	Mimi Root	15	Jane Crowley
7	Grace Plocky	15	Danny Borzage
8	Maureen O'Hara	16	Duke Wayne (after lunch)
9	Meta Sterne	17	Ward Bond (after lunch)
		18	Mr. FitzSimons (after lunch)
			(Eleanor Vogel - out of town)
			(Betsy Palmer - couldn't make it)

Bar set up in room for drinks.
Vichysoise (?)
Broiled Lobster
Au Gratin Potatoes
Vegetable
Parfait
Champagne served with lunch.
After dinner drinks.

The company surrounding 'Himself' forms a typical mix of Ford's regular collaborators, ranging from stars to loyal character actors and support staff, and one can be sure that they did justice to the range of alcohol available before, during and after the meal.

And here is a fan letter from another Irish-American director, Raoul Walsh, about the film Ford shot in 1956 entirely in Ireland, *The Rising of the Moon*.

Raoul Walsh

July 9, 1956

Jack, Me Boy!

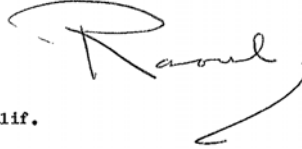
Thanks for having me over the other night. It was just great to see the beautiful Irish COUNTRYSIDE -- THE ROLLING HILLS -- THE LAKES, and THE SEA POUNDING AGAINST THE SHORE of the land so dear to my heart!

Sure, you have the observant eyes that really see! Ears that really hear! And the brain that retains all things of beauty!

Jack, you exceed all of us with the splendor of your imagination!

All these faculties working together account for THE RISING OF THE MOON.

All the best.....

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Raoul". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed address.

Mr. John Ford
125 Copa De Ora
Los Angeles 24, Calif.

RW:hm

Like *The Quiet Man* earlier, that was produced by Lord (Michael) Killanin, an Irishman with whom Ford had a close collaboration and friendship over the years – much closer than with Anderson. This is Killanin on the right, in the brief 16mm footage from the National Film Theatre in 1957, Anderson being on the left:



And in fact Indiana has a separate Killanin collection; so does the Irish Film Archive in Dublin. To quote their respective websites:

“The Lilly Library holds other collections related to John Ford. The largest of these is the Killanin mss. containing 358 items.”

“The IFI Lord Killanin Collection: highlights include correspondence and files relating to John Ford and two of his films, *The Rising of the Moon*, and *Gideon’s Day*.”⁹

The IFI, indeed, has material on all three of the main films they made together, including the first of them, *The Quiet Man* – the film which led to Anderson’s first meeting with Ford. I’ll end by shuffling together a few documents about this film from all three archives, Indiana, Dublin and Stirling. This is of course a fairly common kind of research procedure, since documents are not always all conveniently concentrated in a single place.

Ford had bought the rights to the story of *The Quiet Man* as long as ago as 1936, but he started to prepare it seriously 10 years later. In 1946 he writes to Killanin, expecting to make it soon for the English-based producer Alexander Korda. From the IFI:

SIXTY-EIGHT SIXTY ODIN STREET
HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

Dear Michael:

July 11th, 1946.

The family were all glad to hear from you, and that you had gone to Ireland to live for awhile. I think you are very shrewd in your plans to get your degree. We love the picture of Sheila. As Barbara in the great wisdom of youth says, "Those kids are really in love with each other."

Despite the fact that we have a Labor Government in England and that the entire world is leaning toward the Left, I am still feudal enough to be very happy that your line will go on.

Alex Korda is in town, by the way, and I see quite a bit of him. He says he was so busy when he was in London that he didn't have the chance to drop in and say hello to you.

I am planning to do a picture for Korda next summer. It is a story by Maurice Walsh, called "The Quiet man" and honestly I think it is a grand story. Alex, I believe is going to approach you with the possibility of you working on it. It might be fun. We will wander all around, shooting it in color, all over Ireland, but with the stress laid on Spiddale. I will bring the principals there from America and pick up the incidental parts and bits in England and Ireland. As I said before, it will be photographed in Technicolor and should be beautiful.

The response is positive, and Ford follows up enthusiastically, but, like a lot of Alexander Korda's projects, it falls through. A few years later Ford sets it up through an American company, Republic, and shoots it in 1951. And it is when he is on his way back through Dublin that Anderson manages to do that great interview with him, for *Sequence* magazine.¹⁰

The IFI has plenty more of this warm correspondence between Ford and Killanin, as well as this from Maureen O'Hara – the start and end are worth reproducing in facsimile, I think, despite the murky quality

662, Stone Canyon Road,
West Los Angeles, 24.,
California,
U.S.A.

20th November, 1952.

Lord Killanin,
Four Provinces Films Ltd.,
11, Wellington Quay,
Dublin,
Ireland.

Dear Michael,

You know that I wish "Four Provinces Films" the greatest success in the world, and with Jack at the helm there can be no failure.

"The Quiet Man" is doing wonderful business here, and it gives us all a warm feeling to see an Irish picture so successful.

Please give my best wishes and regards to Sheila, and also to everyone in Spiddale.

Sincerely Yours,



By this time, Lindsay Anderson has resumed his own correspondence with Ford – this is from the Ford archive in Indiana:

*answered
by personally*

19 Hanover Terrace Mews, NW1

April 24th 1952

Dear Mr. Ford,

I've just got back from the trade show of The Quiet Man, and excuse me if I break in on you for a moment to say how much I enjoyed it.

A friend said as we came out "It's like lying in a warm bath... Or rather, it's like being splashed all over with nice things". Meaning that the film relaxes as it delights. We all in Britain admire the dynamism of American film making - but how much more satisfying in the end is this kind of strength, which can afford to pause, or just meander along, instead of beating audiences about the head. I think you've succeeded completely with the fight - in not making it seem at all brutal, I mean. Everyone else is going to exclaim about the wonderful scenic qualities of the picture, so I won't dwell on that. I think the central relationship comes across beautifully - particularly in your marvellous sequences when nobody is saying anything - the thunderstorm in the churchyard is a wonderful love scene.

This time, not surprisingly, he gets a warm reply, thanking him for his response to 'my favorite film – you were charming to write'. The letter is held in the Stirling archive, and is reproduced in full in Karl Magee's paper on this website.¹¹

Ford's next film **The Sun Shines Bright**, set in the deep south in the 1890s, is not nearly so popular; the circuits turn it down, but Anderson persuades a specialist cinema in the West End of London, the Academy, to put it on, and to show it to the critics. This is the last of the letters by Anderson to Ford that I found in the Lilly Library, and it's worth showing in full since it covers three films:

Anderson

57 Greencroft Gardens
London NW6

November 9th 1953

Dear Mrs Ford,

The Sun Shines Bright opened last week - as you must know - and I thought you might be interested to see one or two of the notices. Perhaps you've seen them already: but I can't believe Republic publicity department will have had the sense to forward them to you. (In fact if it had been left to Republic, the film would never have got within miles of the West End. The Academy sought it out for themselves - prompted, I'm happy to say, by my notice in Sight & Sound - one of the fortunate chances which makes one feel there is sometimes some point in writing film criticism!)

By chance Mogambo opened the same week.

I found it excellent light comedy! Well - bits of it anyway. But do you still maintain, Mrs Ford, that you like the English? You certainly caricature them without mercy - and very funny. I have to admit. (After all, I'm not English either!) But I mustn't start getting serious about the film...

Every time I see The Sun Shines Bright

I admire, enjoy & love it more. When I wrote about The Quiet Man I used the word 'Shakespearean'. I feel that in an odd way (I mean it may seem odd to you) about this one too: the end, all harmony and reconciliation is exactly like the close of one of those late, 'unhappy', magical comedies - The Winters Tale or Cymbeline. I hope you're planning another -

My respects and best wishes,

Lindsay Anderson.

Ford does not seem to object to the mild disparagement of *Mogambo*; when they next get a chance, they meet in London, and what Anderson describes as their 'kind of friendship' continues, until their farewell meeting at Ford's deathbed in 1973, so movingly described in *About John Ford*.¹²

Here, finally, is one of the last handwritten notes I have found by Ford – written to Lord Killanin – undated, but almost certainly from 1968 – and held in the Killanin archive in Dublin.

JOHN FORD

dear Michael-

I feel deeply chagrined. Every day I said to myself "I must write Michael. My only excuse is that I haven't been home much - my Medi Tour with the USN + I just came back from a swing around the country lecturing (sic) to college idiots. Horrible! Beatniks, Commies, dirt. I am afraid I was rather rude on occasion.

Anderson didn't like college idiots either. That is one of the fascinating and maddening things about him: he was a University intellectual, a film critic, and one who had expected Ford to take seriously his own criticism of Ford's work, yet he could not cope with the remotest reservations about his own work. When he came to visit East Anglia during my time there, to speak after a screening of *Britannia Hospital*, he would not have called us beatniks or commies, but to say he was 'rather rude' would be an understatement; he certainly treated us all like 'dirt'. That is a final reminder that for all the differences between them in background, in career path, and in achievement, there were strong temperamental affinities between John Ford and Lindsay Anderson.

Material from the John Ford Archive is reproduced courtesy of The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Material from the Killanin collection in Dublin is reproduced courtesy of the Irish Film Institute. Grateful thanks also to Dan Ford and to Redmond Morris.

¹ Lindsay Anderson, *About John Ford* (London: Plexus Books, 1981, and subsequent reissues)

² In addition to these two major items, Anderson in 1988 conducted a session on *My Darling Clementine* for the Channel 4 series 'Masterclass', discussing the film with students from the National Film School. The deeply embarrassing quality of the programme seems attributable equally to the stiltedness of the series format and to Anderson's own impatience with any kind of two-way critical discussion.

³ part 1 of the *Omnibus* programme is included as an extra on the Criterion DVD edition of *Young Mr Lincoln*.

⁴ <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/guides/ford/johnford.shtml>

⁵ Anderson to Ford, 15th May 1948

⁶ Anderson to Ford, 8th July 1948

⁷ Joseph Breen to Walter Wanger, 9th November 1938

⁸ Sergei Eisenstein to Ford, 25th January 1946

⁹ http://www.irishfilm.ie/archive/paper_collections_07.asp

¹⁰ The interview is reprinted in *About John Ford*, pp.19-25

¹¹ Ford to Anderson, 6th May 1952

¹² *About John Ford*, pp.186-188