

GEORDIE



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Frank Launder. Produced and written by Sidney Gillat and Frank Launder. Associate Producer: Leslie Gillat. Based on *Wee Geordie* by David Walker. Cinematography by Wilkie Cooper. Art Direction by Norman G. Arnold. Original Music by William Alwyn. Musical Director and Conductor: Muir Matheson. Edited by Thelma Connel.

Cinematic length: 93 minutes. Distributed by British Lion Films. (Britain) Times Film Corp (USA). Cinematic release: September 1955: VHS release 1995. Check for ratings. Rating 90%.

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Cast

Bill Travers as Geordie

Alastair Sim as the Laird

Norah Gorsen as Jean

Molly Urquhart as Geordie's mother

Jameson Clark as Geordie's father

Doris Goddard as Helga

Francis de Wolff as Henry Samson

Jack Radcliffe as Reverend MacNab

Brian Reece as Olympic Selector 1

Raymond Huntley as Olympic Selector 2

Miles Malleon as Lord Paunceton

Stanley Baxter as the postman

Duncan Macrae as the Schoolmaster

Paul Young as Young Geordie

Anna Ferguson as Young Jean

Review

Geordie (Wee Geordie in the USA release) is a whimsical, charming story, based in a belief in the essential goodness of people. The filmmakers avoid being maudlin, trite or contrived. Their story focuses on an undersized boy, (Paul Young) a gamekeeper's son on the Scottish highlands, who tired of failing and being patronised and baited about his height, sends his money away for an exercise kit to Henry Samson (Francis de Wolff) a body builder.

We see the boy relentlessly exercise, exercise, exercise - and then suddenly aged eighteen he is Henry Travers, six foot five (198cm) and with the physique of an Olympic champion, as virtually everyone but himself realizes. This is what almost everyone wants him to become, except himself.



Francis de Wolff as Henry Samson

Both *Geordie* and *Geordie* seem straightforward and simple, but when thought over contains much more than is at first apparent. The long first scenes showing *Geordie* as a child show how in adulthood his quiet manner, fear of failure, sensitivity to criticism and introversion have developed from



Bill Travers in 1966



Alistair Sim as the laird



Molly Urquhart as Geordie's mother

his childhood sense of exclusion, of being the continual target of ridicule, of not being able to succeed because of his diminutive size. This situation develops into a personal crisis when his taller friend, young Jean, (Anna Ferguson) climbs to the eagle's nest; he can only try - and falls. However he has determination and an ability to focus on a problem and persevere until he has fixed it. This attitude starts with his physique, develops with his work as a gamekeeper and his romance with an adult Jean (Norah Ferguson) and then with his sport of hurling. With hurling he eventually gives in to a combination of encouragement and pressure from his employer (Alastair Sim) Jean, his mother (Molly Urquhart) and Reverend MacNab (Jack Radcliffe). In a futuristic fiction he ends up representing Britain at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics.

Despite much of the film being set in 1956 *Geordie* was released in September 1955. The film began with a caveat that it was about a future possibility, a fact that has been lost for decades and so this becomes a major factor in leading many people to think that this fictional film tells a real life story about a Scottish gold medalist. Actually an American won the gold medal for hurling in 1956. There were other reasons for the delusion. One was the skillful use of the Scottish highlands locale and community, combining with acting and film making that sixty years on still seems seamless. No sense of pretense, of staginess, of watching a put together story emerges, *Geordie* engrosses with the magic films should have. The cast has much to do with this, coming across as perfectly cast in their roles, each performer gives deft touches and nuances to their roles - and they even know when not to be subtle with loud, less than subtle characters.

Bill Travers works so well in the title role that he is Geordie. His voice modulation and use of body language are masterly. The use of the facial expressions of an introverted man are exact. His acting is so perfect that an audience can forget it is seeing an actor, which is probably one reason he was not even nominated for an academy award, performers often fail that way.

Who makes comedies as charming, wistful and memorable as the British did in the period from the forties to the sixties?



Frank Lauder 1906-1997