

Saturday evening September 11

**NATIONAL
FILM
& SOUND
ARCHIVE**

For the Term of His Natural Life – 1927 (Australia)

Cast and Crew: Directed by Norman Dawn, Novel written by Marcus Clarke and adapted to the screen by Norman Dawn, Produced by Australasia Films.

George Fisher as Richard Devine/Rufus Dawes/John Rex, Eva Novak as Sylvia Vickers, Dunstan Webb as Maurice Frere, Jessica Harcourt as Sarah Purfoy, Arthur McLaglen as Gabbett, Katherine Dawn as Mrs Vickers, Arthur Tauchert as Warden Troke.

Restored in 1981 by Graham Shirley, Senior Curator at the NFSA.

The Festival acknowledges the generous assistance of the National Film and Sound Archive and its staff in the screening of this film.

Film: **digital presentation of restored film**

Duration: **98 minutes**

Live music: *accompanist:* Colin Offord

Presented by: **Bruce Elder**^{Senior} Entertainment Writer with the Sydney Morning Herald.

BREAKING NEWS

The Festival is pleased to announce that Graham Shirley, Historian at the National Film and Sound Archive, will attend and speak after the screening.

Some background points that Graham has kindly made available to the Festival and its supporters:

- He knew *Term's* director Norman Dawn, exchanging about 4 years of correspondence with him in the 1970s and visiting him in US to conduct a detailed oral history
- Dawn gave him the copy of the *Term* novel that Marion Marcus Clarke (niece of the author) had given to him to adapt from when he made the film. Dawn worked from no direct script, but from this copy of the novel.
- Graham used this copy of the novel to guide his editorial reconstruction and restoration (including the writing of inter-titles) of *Term* in 1981
- He interviewed technicians who worked on the film, and one of the performers (Jessica Harcourt, who attended the 1927 premiere, and the premiere of the 1981 restoration)
- He will speak about the several sources of footage that contributed to the restoration and the tinting and toning choices that he made for the restoration. Dominic Case, who worked at the then Colorfilm Laboratories, devised the technology to replicate the tints and tones (fine-tuning their choices with Graham), and will be in the audience at the screening.

For the Term of His Natural Life – Australia (1927)

This grand Hollywood-style Australian epic was a huge success at its release in 1927, and would no doubt have achieved even greater acclaim if not for the advent of sound in moving pictures at the end of the 1920s. To ensure its success in the USA, the leading cast and crew were American, but it was filmed entirely in Australia, and of course, the story is based on the Australian classic, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, written by Marcus Clarke and first published in 1870.

The first motion picture version of Clarke's novel was in 1908, and was one of the world's first full-length movies, produced and directed in Australia by an Australian, Charles McMahon, and ran a total of 22 minutes – a long film in the infancy of cinema! It was even re-released in 1913 with live narration by a popular Australian celebrity, which made it a hit all over again. Some years later, in 1918, the story was again brought to life in an altered version under the titles *His Convict Bride*, aka *For the Term of Her Natural Life*.

By the mid to late 1920s, silent films had become fully mature, visually expressing story, emotions, concepts and characters in various creative and artistic ways which could not be continued once technology enabled sound to be synchronized with moving pictures. As a result, the 1927 production of *For the Term of His Natural Life* contains all the

best elements of sophisticated films that had been developed in the first 30 years of moving pictures.

The rather complex but rewarding story moves along at a fresh, brisk pace, with consistently stunning and beautiful scenery and sets, all filmed in Australia: the charming old town of Berrima in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales; Sydney Harbour; Port Arthur, Tasmania; Wombeyan Caves and Bondi Junction, Sydney for the interiors.

Unfortunately, the ravages of time have reduced this stunning epic to a shorter length due to occasional missing and damaged scenes, but it has been faithfully restored, using stills and extra intertitles to fill the gaps in the story. The result is still a gripping saga of a man wrongfully accused and sent to the harsh penal colony of Van Diemen's Land – for the term of his natural life.

For the Term of His Natural Life depicts much more than the hardships of life in early colonial Australia, however. An intriguing plot involving two look-alike men (both played by American actor, George Fisher) and a colourful cast of characters keeps the audience in suspense until the very end. Mistaken for his murderer-double, wealthy Englishman Richard Devine is sent to the penal colony, giving the false name of Rufus Dawes to protect his mother's reputation.

Later, Dawes crosses the path of his look-alike, John Rex, who continues to scheme and plot all the way back to England where Rex attempts to take the place of Richard Devine who had been presumed dead for nearly 20 years. Meanwhile, there is the bitter heartache of a sweet love, found and lost, and finally found again for 'the good Mr. Dawes', as a young Sylvia (played by American actress, Eva Novak) called him when he rescued her and a small group of survivors stranded in the wilderness.

Also prominent in the cast is the English-born actor, Arthur McLaglen, in the role of the exceptionally wicked Gabbett, who first attempts a mutiny, frames the innocent Rufus Dawes, and later encourages cannibalism among his group of escapees.

Australian actor, Arthur Tauchert, of *The Sentimental Bloke* fame, plays Warden Troke, and Jessica Harcourt stands out as the beautiful but bad Sarah Purfoy, John Rex's lover and accomplice. Most of the remaining secondary and minor roles were played by Australians, with many locals playing extras.

The success and popularity of the story, *For the Term of His Natural Life* is evident in that an Australian TV miniseries was made in 1983 with Colin Friels as Dawes, and the 1927 silent film is as captivating and breathtaking eighty years later as it was when it first opened in cinemas.

