

Silver Screen Tribute to Charles Dickens

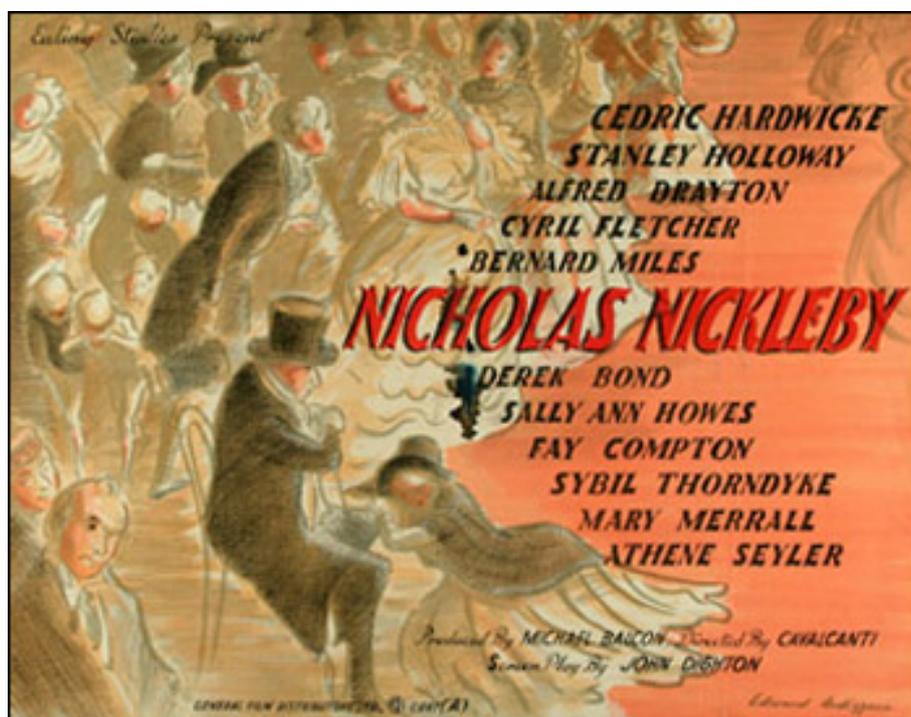


***The Life and Adventures
of Nicholas Nickleby (1947)***

Running time 108 minutes

Director Alberto Cavalcanti

**Cast: Cedric Hardwicke, Derek Bond, Sybil Thorndike,
Sally Ann Howes and Bernard Miles**



June 25 Sunday at 2pm

**Digital restoration with soundtrack
Metcalfe Auditorium State Library NSW Macquarie St Sydney**

*Tickets through festival website and call t 0419 267318
Tickets \$20/ \$15 Friend of the Library and concession*

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“The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby (1947) was Alberto Cavalcanti's last film for Ealing Studios and was released just after David Lean's well-received adaptation of Dickens' less complicated novel Great Expectations (1947).

With its somewhat episodic storyline, Nicholas Nickleby certainly poses some difficult challenges for a filmmaker looking to conflate a seven hundred page novel into a clear visual narrative. Perhaps it is unsurprising to find that many contemporary critics found the film too pacy and decidedly unfocused, complaining of the rapid movement between events and characters and the lack of a definable moral or theme. However, looking again at Cavalcanti's film some of the contemporary responses seem harsh. There are suggestions of

a neo-realist approach to the direction that gives some scenes, especially those at Dotheboys Hall, a ferocity unmatched by other Dickens' adaptations of that era." BFI screenonline



"Ealing produce a more worthy Dickens adaptation with *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* thirteen years later, directed by the Brazilian Alberto Cavalcanti. When Nicholas' father dies, the

immediate family turns to the wealthy but relentless uncle, Ralph Nickleby (Cecil Hardwicke).

The age of the workhouse, inherent to the bulk of Dickens' work, is our ambience once again in this very British adaptation.

Although *Nickleby* is far from promoting the same vivaciousness as the likes of *Oliver Twist* or *A Christmas Carol*, what it does promote is an old-country charm, responsible for sparking nostalgia for Dickens and for Ealing productions.

It is the early nineteenth century. The noble and upstanding Nicholas (Derek Bond) is sent away to work at the hell-on-earth orphanage, Dotheboys Hall – and it is exactly what it says on the tin, as the boys are no strangers to the whips and scorns of their abusive, tyrannous and low-life headmaster Mr. Squeers (Alfred Drayton). At the school, happiness is a mystery. The beloved son and brother Nicholas takes it upon himself to withdraw Smike (Aubrey Woods), the most ill treated and most sympathetic of all the boys, and to rehome him. What Nicholas fails to realise is that in this cold, self-indulgent and brutal world, kindness and absolutes have no place.

In being thrown from one job to another, Nicholas finally breaks from the charitable shackles of his rich uncle. When he stumbles across a friendly individual who finds likeliness in Nicholas, the belated fortune that falls in his direction is enough to liberate his mother and sister, and to see that, once his true intentions are discovered, the rotten uncle Nickleby doesn't. Many of the performances are commendable, notably that of Hardwicke as he renders the uncle with such memorability that it serves even to downplay the likely efforts of our protagonist. Filling the shoes of that one stock Dickens character (as Quilp is to *Curiosity*), whose eccentricity reasons submission to a mental institute, is Bernard Miles as Newman Noggs. Playing as the repressed servant to the vindictive and demonic Ralph Nickleby, it is no wonder Noggs is driven to such extremities of character."

Frontrowreviews.co.u

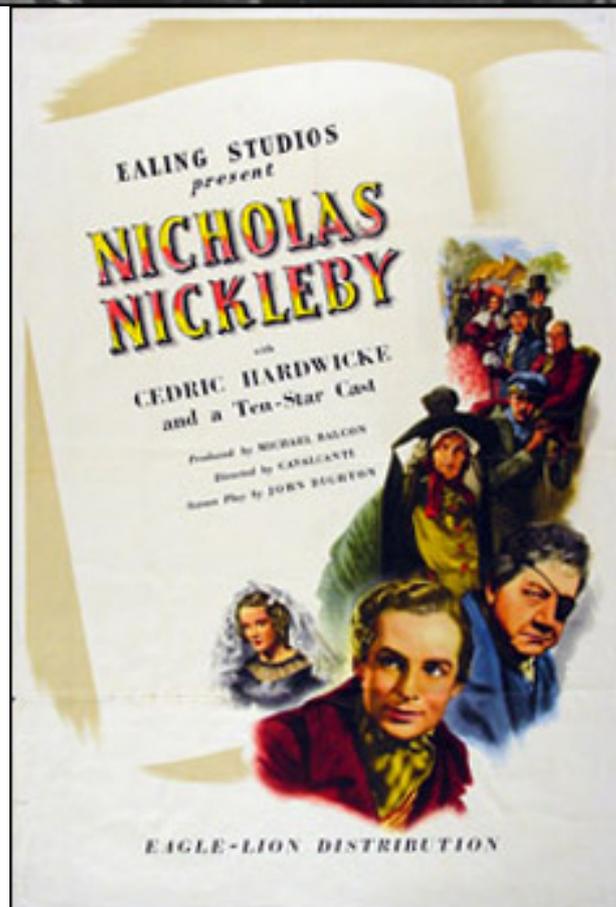
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LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, THE (1947)

“Nicholas Nickleby, with its wealth of incident and characters, is a difficult novel to adapt, and this has been attempted by concentration on the main plot, with glimpses only of some characters and the omission of others. Since, however, the book's main appeal lies in its queer people, many lovers of Dickens will be angered by the treatment of their favourites. For example, devotees of the Mantalins will find them not only very briefly presented by Cyril Fletcher and Fay Compton but also quite wrongly. Sir Cedric Hardwicke is too gentlemanly as the rugged villain, Ralph; Derek Bond makes an attractive Nicholas; but Sally Ann Howes is an odd choice for Kate; Jill Balcon as Madeline at least looks more Dickensian. Alfred Drayton and Sybil Thorndike as the Squeers give suitably revolting portraits; and Stanley Holloway is an excellent Mr. Crummles, of whom too little is seen. Director and adaptor have only partially succeeded in the conjurer's task of getting a quart into a pint pot; and Dickens has proved too generous a creator to be squeezed into 108 minutes of screen time.”

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/media/mfb/1000191/index.html>



The Festival appreciates the invaluable and generous support from the renowned David Shepard, Film Preservation and Associates and Blackhawk Films, Lobster Films, Serge Bromberg, Studio Canal, Greg Denning, Flicker Alley, Robert Gamlen, Samantha Hagan, Marcelo Flaksbard, Hilton Prideaux, Stephen Davies, Bob Gamlen, Leslie Eric May and the sublime flair and talents of Stephanie Khoo.

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In Memoriam David Shepard

1940-2017



