

News

Horror classic back from the dead after attic clear-out

Jack Malvern

When Jeff Wells moved house, he decided that the attic was the best place for an old 16mm film he had picked up in a junk shop. The cinema fan had no idea that what he had picked up in the bargain bin was an acclaimed horror movie that had been missing for more than 50 years.

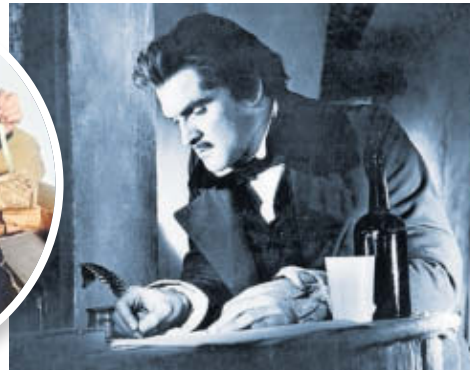
The company that made the adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Tell-Tale Heart* had almost given up hope of seeing it again after all copies were thought to have been destroyed.

The 20-minute film, starring Stanley Baker, was well received on its release in 1953 but hopes of finding an intact copy

seemed distant until Mr Wells, 65, decided to clear out his attic.

He had been working as a nurse in Brighton when he found the reel in 1984 in the junk shop. He took it with him when he moved to Drummore, near Stranraer in Dumfries and Galloway, in 2002, and kept the reel in his attic until October last year, when he had a clear-out and decided to sell it on eBay for £5. On doing further research, however, he discovered that it was a rare, possibly unique, copy that was sought by Adelphi Films, the company that made it.

The British Film Institute, where the



Stanley Baker is the sole actor in the film, discovered by Jeff Wells, left

looking for. Its discovery was a happy accident."

Kate Lees, who inherited Adelphi from her father, Stanley Dent, had almost given up hope of finding it. "It's a really good film," she said. "It's very spooky, gothic and scary and it's well directed. Stanley Baker is terrific. My father said what a good film it was and he was a very discerning critic. He didn't like a lot of our films."

She drove 400 miles to Mr Wells's house to pick it up and took it to the BFI, where it has been restored and will be available free on the BFI Player for two weeks from Friday before being reserved for subscribers. The institute will release it as part of a Halloween season of "horror curios" including *Cross-Roads* (1955), Christopher Lee's first supernatural screen role, in which he appears as a vengeful ghost.

Josephine Botting, a BFI curator, said: "It's always exciting when a missing film comes to light and an addition to the catalogue of the British producer Adelphi and the filmography of Edgar Allan Poe is a wonderful discovery. We're delighted to be preserving the 16mm print and to make the film available online to new audiences via BFI Player in time for Halloween."

The film should not be confused with a 1934 version, also available on the BFI Player, which is described as having acting "as wooden as the settings".

film has been restored and digitised so it can be viewed online, has described it as a lost gem with a powerful performance by Baker, who is best known as the British commander in *Zulu*. He is the sole actor in the film, in which he appears in a frock coat narrating the story of how he murdered his servant and got away with it. As the film closes the audience realises that he has been driven mad and is haunted by the sound of his own heartbeat.

Mr Wells said: "I was stunned when I saw it was the same one I had. I really couldn't believe it. I thought that it can't possibly be the one I have they are

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