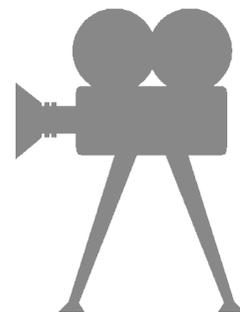


Running Scared - back on the big screen

In the autumn of 2011, almost exactly forty years after its release in 1971, and after an extensive search with many people involved, possibly the last surviving copy of this long-lost canal-thriller was finally found somewhere in America. The movie was then shown by the Braunston Cinema Club in early December to two packed houses at Braunston Village Hall, in the presence of its co-star Gayle Hunnicutt. It was a cinematic night to remember.

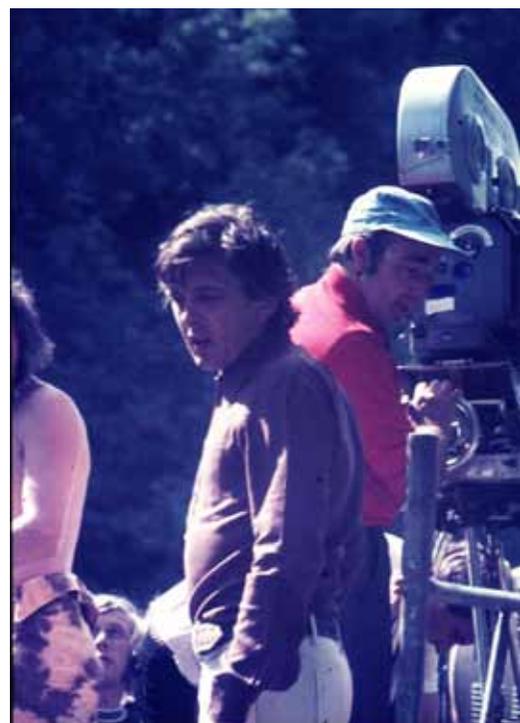
Tim Coghlan was there...



For those wondering why the no-talent-spared and money no-problem canal-thriller *Running Scared* sank without trace within little more than a week of its launch, the first fifteen minutes says it all. They begin with a morbid suicide of a Cambridge undergraduate in his college rooms,



⚒ Preparing for ACTION! Stars Robert Powell and Gayle Hunnicutt on the stern of the converted and engined wooden *Walkers of Rickmansworth* c. 1935 butty *Byfield*. It was made-over by the film carpenters and painters in the two months prior to the filming at Braunston Bottom Lock Dock, and renamed the *Virginia Rose* for the film. The boat seen here is in its best livery. For pre-makeover scenes, the team could quickly turn it into a wreck by spraying the superstructure with latex, painting it with black emulsion, and then throwing sacks of wood shavings over the wet paint. That process could equally easily be reversed by peeling off the latex. The stars are seen here on the Grand Union Canal above the top lock at Long Itchington, which is just visible. The camera crew, who are preparing for a take, are precariously balanced on a large punt hired from Braunston based Union Canal Carriers. The punt is attached to the stern of the *Virginia Rose* by a pair of scaffold poles, so the two boats can move in tandem whilst filming, which also gives the punt a modicum of stability. (*Jim Marshall*)



⚒ No-talent spared: Director/producer/screenplay-writer and star of *Blow Up*, David Hemmings is seen left in white trousers and brown shirt. The great cinematographer Ernest Day - of many David Lean films, including *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Dr Zhivago*, and several *Bond* films is seen here getting ready for filming, sporting his iconic blue cap. The previous year he had worked on Lean's *Ryan's Daughter* - another dreadful film, which was slammed by the critics - but was saved by Day's wonderful photography of a rural Ireland which has since largely disappeared. (*Jim Marshall*)

who has slashed his wrists and bleeds to death in front of his room mate Tom Betancourt, played by Robert Powell. There is a police enquiry and no charges are pressed against him, Powell saying: 'We discussed it. It was what he wanted'. There's a hint of a gay relationship - still then a dark taboo subject. Amazingly there is no coroner inquest, when Betancourt would have met the suicide's family.

Instead, he drops out of Cambridge

: - surprisingly his wealthy parents don't have a problem with this - and heads for his friend's funeral in the Northamptonshire village of Braunston, where the suicide's equally wealthy parents live in the large white regency former-rectory on the hilltop overlooking the canal. He notices the canal, and at the burial service, his flat-mate's beautiful sister Ellen, played by Gayle Hunnicutt, and becomes transfixed by both. At the wake he introduces himself



✦ **Stars in their eyes:** Robert Powell and Gayle Hunnicutt caught on camera whilst chatting, before filming the scene above Stockton Top Lock. They seem oblivious to the preparations going on around them. Their real life relationship was obviously a lot happier! Despite the film's disastrous failure, both stars went on to enjoy very successful film and television careers, which for Robert Powell include the TV comedy *The Detectives* with Jasper Carrott - a dramatic change from his macabre role here - and Gayle Hunnicutt had many years as JR Ewing's old flame in *Dallas*. She divorced David Hemmings in 1974. She was then married for 30 years to UK journalist and author Simon Jenkins - now Chairman of the National Trust. (*Jim Marshall*)

as a college friend of her late brother, but denies any further knowledge of his death. He buys and refits the wreck of an old wooden working narrowboat in the boatyard below the former-rectory, and having wooed and won Ellen, the two go off together down the canal in what is supposed to be a great escape - which allows for some fantastic canal shots.

Haunting

But all is not well - those haunting opening lines from Roy Orbison's 1961 hit, '*Just running scared, each place we go...*' from which the film-title seems to derive: both remain troubled by that death, and there are constant flash-backs to the suicide. The relationship begins to disintegrate as Ellen increasingly suspects Tom's involvement in it. Near the film's end, there is the morbid death of Powell's dog, *Andy*, being run over on Daventry High Street. It is followed by Tom going berserk and finally killing himself by crashing his sports car over the A45 bridge and into the canal at Braunston. The dramatic death is of Wagnerian operatic proportions with the car amazingly bursting into flames in the canal. Like something out of the end of Wagner's *Gotterdamung*, Tom is

immolated in the process, as on cue, the sun sinks golden into the western sky. Ellen somehow witnesses this suicide, standing not far away on Braunston's answer to the Rhine's Lorelei Rock, the surviving stump of the 1934 canal wall on the non-towpath side. In the closing moments, she is silhouetted against the final flames of her lost flame. The photography and music are amazing, however unreal the closing scene.

Moral dilemma

The showing of the film was introduced by Braunston villager John Foster, who formerly worked for the BBC as Chief Parliamentary Correspondent. He quoted Hemmings' description of *Running Scared* as 'A relationship film that explores the moral dilemma of suicide and death.'

Amongst the many who were involved in the original filming and attended the screening was June Hayes. At that time she was the casting director for the Rugby Theatre and took on the role of supplying the extras, including the large number required for the Daventry High Street scene, in which she appeared herself. She described *Running Scared*



✦ **Standing room only:** The sheer number of film crew - most of them standing around doing what appears to be very little - is one of the phenomena of film-making. Such was the number for *Running Scared* that they took up all of the B&B space in Braunston, and had to overspill into local hotels in Daventry and Rugby. They were all paid in cash each Friday, which they collected from the old windmill in Braunston, now converted to a house, which was rented as the film production office. Much of this was spent in the local pubs, except the *Admiral Nelson*, whose landlord Hubert Clarke refused to sell 'fancy drinks' and did not supply ice. Food was provided free to the crew from a food wagon which arrived the day before filming began in the summer of 1971 and stayed at Braunston Bottom Lock car park for the two months of filming. (*Jim Marshall*)



to me as, 'Not a film to appeal to happy people.'

In that mode, I was minded of those lines in George Bernard Shaw's *Complete Wagnerite*, when he commented on Wagner's great love-death opera *Tristan and Isolde*, 'To enjoy this opera, you have to have experienced true love. Fortunately there are enough opera goers who have, to keep this work in the repertory.' Obviously there were not enough unhappy people around at the time to give this film a good airing. It ran for little more than a week in London before it was withdrawn. There was also a brief showing in Coventry, to which on one day, organized bus parties went from Braunston and Daventry of those who had been involved or watched the film being made. One who was there commented, 'We made up most of the audience. I could tell by the accents.' In his *The Independent* obituary in 2003, Hemmings was quoted as saying of *Running Scared*: 'I think it's a beautiful movie. It was seen by absolutely nobody.'

First attempt

Having become a world famous actor in the 'mid '60s iconic film *Blow Up*, this was David Hemmings's first attempt both at directing and co-producing, and it



Grave matters: The Braunston old cemetery by the church was used, complete with open grave, for the filming of the burial of Casey, who had committed suicide at Cambridge. In real life, the occupants of that part of the cemetery were made up in large part by former working boatmen and boatbuilders. (Roger Palmer)

showed. The poor screenplay was, in addition, co-written by him, again as his first attempt. It was based on the 1963 American novel *Running Scared*, which has the same story line, but was set in Yale and the creeks of Long Island. A US version had been made, and Hemmings

had acquired the UK rights, but moving the story to Cambridge and the canal, which was then enjoying a major national campaign to save it - working on a summer WRG canal-restoration camp was almost on a par with cutting cane in Cuba or working in a Israel kibbutz.

The screenplay frequently lost its way. In particular there were two long and tedious stocking-filler scenes of



Getting ready to film in what is today Braunston Marina: In 1971, the majority of canal leisure-craft were GRP cruisers, as seen here. The 'unrestored' butty *Virginia Rose*, rather draped in canvas is to the left, and is what Tom Betancourt had just bought, having decided to make a new life on the canal, including doing up an old wooden working boat. The photograph shows extensive mature elms across the canal, illustrating just how great the subsequent loss of these trees was. Otherwise the marina is much as it was when Tim Coghlan bought it in 1988 from the Receivers of *Ladyline*, following its founding by Michael Streat in the 1960s. (Roger Palmer)





✿ **Setting up the shot:** The stand-in look-alike for Gayle Hunnicutt, complete with long hair, is filmed with a smaller camera by the camera assistant on the approach to the bridge below Braunston Top Lock. A great deal of trial and error filming went on before the real thing, when Gayle and Powell would step into the prepared shot. Ernest Day and team were perfectionists. A bonus from the film was recording the small amount of ad hoc canal carrying that still went on - as seen here - after the collapse of canal-carriers Blue Line and Willow Wren carriers in 1970. (Susan Duddington)



Tom and his father playing extremely amateur tennis, serving no real dramatic purpose. This was ironic as Gayle Hunnicutt's partner, the great tennis commentator Richard Evans, was with her for the evening, he having just come from commentating on the APT World Tour at the O2 arena. And besides Ellen's painfully slow discovery of Tom's involvement in her brother's death, there is no other dramatic development of the type that's two-a-penny in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - I would have at least expected an avenging Ellen's father setting out to have Tom murdered in the true tradition of Greek tragedy. But instead their meetings seem pretty amicable.

✿ **LEFT: 'The large white regency former-rectory on the hilltop overlooking the canal':** The scene during the 2010 Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally, which bar the loss of the elms, is little changed from the summer of 1971. It shows Hemmings' reason to choose the beautiful canal at Braunston for the location of *Running Scared*. It was later used as a location for an episode of *Inspector Morse* and BBC's *Songs of Praise*. The white house is today called Merryhill House, and was rented for the filming, providing both the home for the character Ellen Case and parents, and storage of the masses of film equipment. Hemmings insisted on the rose garden being removed for the filming as it made the house 'look too cheerful'. (Tim Coghlan)

Star appearance

The Braunston Premier saw a gathering together of many who had been involved in the filming. The star was the actress Gayle Hunnicutt, now aged 68, and still very glamorous, who played the leading lady, Ellen Case. Astonishingly, despite her then husband David Hemmings directing the film, this was to be the first occasion when she had seen it. She explained, 'You tend to move on after making a film, and do something else. By the time the film is edited, it's history.'

At the reception before the showing, she spoke to the special guests and was full of stories about the filming,

including her memories of how cold it was when she and Powell went swimming in Calcutt Reservoir near Napton, for which they had to do three takes. Most of the filming was in Braunston, including the interior of her mews flat in London, for which an upper room of a local barn was used. She had to locally find and select all the interior fittings, which as an American somewhat terrified her. She described how on her way to the village hall, she had stopped at Braunston Marina where a great deal of filming took place. She described it as 'Still very pretty, but the boats have got a lot fancier.' She had enjoyed working with Robert Powell, 'He is great fun and still a special friend.' She now lives in London near the Regents Canal, which she regularly walks, bringing back memories of the film and her six months in Braunston.

Robert Powell could not come as he was filming. David Hemmings died in 2003, and his co-producer Stanley O'Toole is also now dead, but he was represented by his wife and four of his children. His wife did once have video of the film, but that was lost in a house move.



Getting ready to roll: Preparations well underway for the final suicide-scene when Tom Betancourt drives his Austin Healey over the A45 bridge at Braunston, and into the canal, where it explodes into a dramatic ball of flames. A great deal of time and effort was spent on working out this stunt - the fine car seen here with stunt-man at the wheel, was not the one that ended up in the canal. Large numbers of people turned up to watch the filming, being amazingly allowed to within 15 yards of where the ejected car landed. For the immolation scene, another car body was placed upside down on a scaffold platform, which was just below the water. A former *Barlows/Blue Line* working boat-woman Rose Whitlock, who watched it, was heard by Jim Marshall to exclaim: 'E's stemmed up on the inside!' - i.e. he had got stuck on the mud on the inside of the bend at the bridge. (Roger Palmer)



Jim Marshall reminiscing to Gayle Hunnicutt of his memories of the filming: It was his wooden historic narrowboat, that was used in the film, renamed the *Virginia Rose*. He was involved in the rebuilding of the boat - so the side panels could be removed for filming interior shots. He also worked the engine from down below during the filming, as Powell pretended to drive it from the hatch. He also moved the boat around to the chosen locations, and often acted as a stand-in for distant shots of Robert Powell driving the boat. He said, 'Braunston was invaded by this alien, but benign force. I just remember David Hemmings' kindness, which came from being a true professional. He and his team were so confident of what they could do, that there was no side to them.' (Tim Coghlan)

Saviour

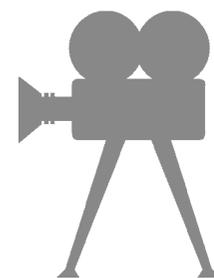
Today the film's saviour are the brilliant canal scenes, mostly in Braunston, on the local canal and in the marina, which take up about a third of the film. The Director of Photography was Ernest Day, one of the greatest post war British cameramen, whose credits included *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago* - and several *Bond* films. Given the date of the filming, in the summer of 1971, just at the very end of the working days on the canal, the scenes are also now of historic value to the canal enthusiast. That Ernest Day's work was simply lost until the film's rediscovery by the Braunston Cinema Club is quite astonishing. What we now need is a cut version of this film, with just the Cut!

However there are major issues of copyright, as no-one knows who owns the film, with the three co-producers

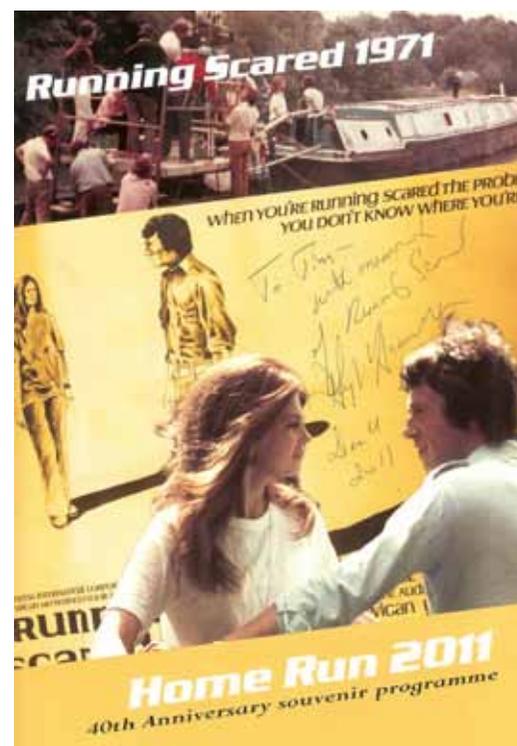
now dead, including Hemmings, who was also the director. On legal advice the Braunston Cinema Club have set aside a sum for the two viewings so far, but releasing a DVD or even stills of Ernest Day's great work, are currently impossible. All the photographs now surviving were taken by the local press or amateurs of the film being made, including some great ones in colour from Jim Marshall whose boat was used. There are none of the original stills.

We had hoped to have a special viewing of *Running Scared* for our Historic Narrowboat Rally, but even this was turned down on advice from the lawyers. It is all very sad, as the 1971 *Running Scared* sits neatly at the end of the three great movies made of the canals - *Painted Boats* in 1944 and *The Bargee* in 1962, all recording the working canals in their final days. 🙏

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🌸 **Flowers for the leading lady:** Sandy Macdonald presents Gayle Hunnicutt with a large bouquet of flowers following the screening of *Running Scared*. Gayle suggested everyone should now retire to Braunston's *Wheat Sheaf Inn*, as they used to do after a day's filming. Jim Marshall had written in the excellent programme, 'The Sheaf filled each night with a film crew that knew and respected each other's expertise, from the films they had worked on together. Over £100 was frequently wagered on games of darts - that more than £1,000 today!' (Tim Coghlan)



🎬 **Home Run 2011 – 20th Anniversary souvenir programme:** The Braunston Cinema Club produced an excellent high quality 28 page souvenir programme, full of information, memories and anecdotes about that summer of 1971, when the village of Braunston was home to some of the greatest actors and film makers of that time. Shown here is Tim Coghlan's copy, autographed by Gayle Hunnicutt, *To Tim, With memories of Running Scared*. Gayle will add to her memories of Braunston when she opens the 2012 *Braunston Historic Narrowboat Rally* and once more goes narrowboating on the canal at Braunston. (Braunston Cinema Club)