

WHAT WERE YOU WATCHING 40 YEARS AGO?

THIS YEAR marks the **40th anniversary** of the foundation of the South West Group of the British Federation of Film Societies (now **Cinema for All South West**).

Lyme Regis FS has been a member for many years and the programmes of all its members have been enriched by the many hundreds of films it has championed during this time. So, what did the film landscape look like in the year of that incredibly hot UK summer, the bane of all cinema managers and owners?

We thought it might be fun to don the mantle of nostalgia and take a look back . . .

Then, as now, film for the majority of cinemagoers meant the latest from Hollywood plus, if we were lucky, the occasional quality film from home shores. (Britain, alas, had discovered sex, so *Keep It Up Downstairs* and *Confessions of a Driving Instructor* were likely to be playing; at least we could seek out *Bugsy Malone* and *The Slipper and the Rose* to cleanse our palates.)

There were two good horror films in 1976 – *Carrie* and *The Omen*, both popular – and we had the last gasp of the classic western, for a little while, with *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and *The Shootist*. Controversy was taken care of by *Deep Throat* (the object of 11 trials in American states by March) and Japan's *In the Realm of the Senses*, which was banned in the UK for many years.



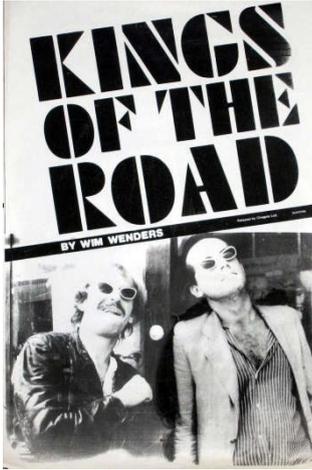
Moving on to the films that were lauded critically, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (a 1975 title, of course) swept the board at the Oscars® in March and topped the 1976 box office charts by some margin. Second place in the charts was held by *All the President's Men*, another fine film. A year hence, and the two 1976 releases that dominated the Academy Awards® were *Rocky* and *Network*.

Whilst their success can be justified, it was also unfortunate, in the sense that *Taxi Driver* missed out on everything – and, as we all know, established a pattern of overlooking Martin Scorsese's work for many years to come. However, it did win the Palme d'Or at Cannes and Jodie Foster also won a Bafta for her work in this and *Bugsy Malone*.

Some small consolation was to be had, however, in that the American Academy did nominate the Italian masterpiece *Seven Beauties* for Best Film and Best Director.

Indeed, Lina Wertmuller was the first woman to be cited in that capacity – and not much progress has been made in the 40 years since. 1976 also saw the César awards ceremony make its debut (the first prize awarded went to *Le Vieux Fusil*) and Jerusalem's first Jewish Film Festival.





Wim Wenders was attracting some attention for his enigmatic movie *Kings of the Road*; references in it to the work of Fritz Lang took on an extra aura of sadness, as the legendary director passed away in August.

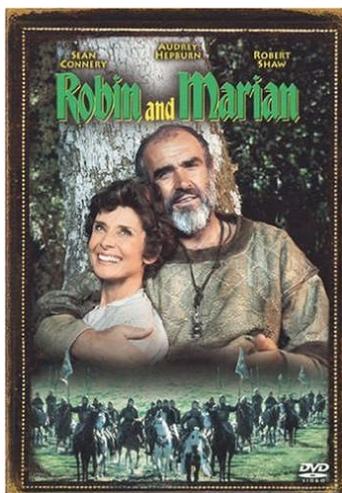
We bade farewell also to Carol Reed, Busby Berkeley and Luchino Visconti, as well as screen greats Jean Gabin, Paul Robeson and the inimitable Alastair Sim; not forgetting, too, the Paramount Pictures mogul Adolf Zukor who died in June aged 103.

Coincidentally, 1976 was a significant year for me and my love of film. This was the year I took up my place at university and so, as a member, became involved with the film society movement.

The Commodore cinema in Aberystwyth, as well as putting on a varied programme with some great double bills (*Dirty Harry* plus *The Streetfighter*, for example), had a fortnightly film society much as we have done at the Regent. Even better, Llanbadarn Film Society, operating on a Monday, showed a wonderful range of movies weekly.

So, what was I watching? As it happens, I began recording the titles from 3 October onwards! (I had started my television list the year before; packing my suitcase for university interrupted my viewing at no. 399, *Carry on Teacher*.)

Skipping through the Commodore's regular programme (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Marathon Man*, *Confessions of a Driving Instructor* – well, I did say earlier . . .) my very first viewings, in Fresher's Week, were a Japanese short *Ghost Story* and Milos Forman's *Taking Off* (1971).



Other early gems in my list were *Serpico*, *Ulzana's Raid*, *Fahrenheit 451* and the Russian classic *Ballad of a Soldier*. Little did I realise that BFFS-SW were also programming *The Sunshine Boys* (no. 67 for me) and *The Conversation*, although I believe I missed the latter – essay or pub no doubt!

I have a feeling, too, that I contrived to miss perhaps the most understated gem of 1976 – Richard Lester's *Robin and Marian* with Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn giving superb, deeply touching performances.

One thing is for sure – having recently resorted to Google to find interesting films being shown within a 30 mile radius, and discovering that it was multiple shows of *Bridget Jones's Baby*, the new Tim Burton and little else, my fond memories of 1976 are not misplaced.

David Johnson

Lyme Regis Film Society