

A New Look at the Film Company of Ireland

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The Film Company of Ireland (est. 1916) has been unfairly overlooked in histories of Irish cinema. Dwarfed by the success of the Kalem company (and associates) in Ireland between 1910 and 1914, interest in it is also stymied by the fact that most of the films it produced are lost. However, this first indigenous Irish fiction film company is deserving of greater scholarly attention. This paper will look at the eventful first year of the company, from its beginning in March 1916 to the period just before the production of its first feature film the following year. It was one of the most productive for the company because at least nine short films were made in various locations in Dublin, Wicklow, and Kerry. As most of the focus on this company to date has been on the two extant feature length films, this body of short films has been neglected. For example, standard volumes of Irish cinema history such as Ruth Barton's *Irish National Cinema* and *Cinema and Ireland* by Kevin Rockett *et al.* give strong analysis of the two feature films only. Using archival sources, I will examine what kind of films the company was making in its first year of operating. What is clear from these sources is that the company was determined to make Irish films, in Ireland, with Irish actors. More than that, they wanted to show Ireland as it truly was, to depict rural and urban Ireland in the 1910s, and to move away from the stereotypical and frequently negative image of Irishness depicted in American and English films (*Evening Herald*, 1918). However, it is worth noting that the company was also influenced by global trends in the film industry, such as the employment of stage actors in screen roles and the contemporary fondness for adaptations. It was both an Irish company and an international company. This article will focus on the Irish aspect of the company.

In March 1916, the Film Company of Ireland set up offices at 16 Henry Street. The aim of the company was to “establish, organise and work in Ireland the manufacture and construction of cinema films of every

description and to engage in the making of scenic and dramatic moving pictures, and in the sale and exchange of cinema pictures, and to engage in the employment of skilled and unskilled labour, and of all such artistes, authors, and performers as the development of the business may require” (“An Irish Film Company”). A month later the same offices were destroyed in the Easter Rising and the company moved to 34 Dame Street (“Display Ad 31”). Dame Street was not an unnatural habitat for the company as, at the time, many other film businesses also had offices there. These included the Gaumont film company where its Dublin premises were located for the screening and distribution of its films, and the Fox Film Company had offices at Dame House in on the same street (“Fox Publicity”). The Express Film Agency was also in Dame Street at the Commercial Buildings (“La Gioconda”). This was an excellent location for a neophyte film company, strategically surrounding itself with other strong players in the industry, and beside the Dame Street Picture House: the cinema where most of its films were first shown (“The Irish Limelight”).

The names on the company register are James Mark Sullivan and Henry Fitzgibbon, but this does not reflect the full cohort of those who ran the company. Fitzgibbon went to America in November 1916 and seems to have relinquished his interest in filmmaking at that point. (“Film Company of Ireland”). In reality the company was run by the husband-and-wife team James and Ellen Sullivan. It was they who hired actors, directors, and crew members, approved scripts, and produced the films. They also had the artistic vision for the company, focusing on screenplays of Irish interest. They were determined to show the modern Irish person on screen and to move away from previous stereotypical depictions.

James was an Irish American who emigrated from Kerry as a child with his parents. Educated at Yale, he was a lawyer by training, and he married Ellen (Nell) O’Mara from Limerick in 1910. Nell was well educated, well read, well travelled, wealthy, and cosmopolitan. She returned with James to America on their marriage and they lived in New York until 1913 when he was appointed Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Dominican Republic. When he left that post in 1915, the Sullivans returned to Ireland, setting up home in Dublin where they established the Film Company of Ireland the following year. Nothing in their backgrounds indicates any previous connection to the film industry, which makes the achievements of the first year even more impressive. To begin with they hired actors, most of whom came from the Abbey Theatre, including Joseph Michael Kerrigan, the well-known character actor and Abbey tutor. Kerrigan was the first film director of the company, taking charge of its initial films. Alongside Kerrigan were other actors from the National Theatre, including Fred O’Donovan, the leading man at the Abbey who would also go on to direct films for the company.

The ambition and enthusiasm of the company’s members, and their ability to promote their films, have given rise to discrepancies between accounts on the number of films they advertised as being made and about to be made. Extant records for the number of films that were ultimately

shown in cinemas are also tentative. This article focuses on the films that were given a cinematic release between March 1916 and March 1917 as it is the only way we can say for sure that these films were made. The nine films screened in cinemas are: *O'Neil of the Glen*, *The Miser's Gift*, *Food of Love*, *An Unfair Love Affair*, *The Girl of Glenbeigh*, *The Eleventh Hour*, *Romance of Puck Fair*, *Widow Malone*, and *A Woman's Wit*. It is most likely that all of them were directed by Joseph Michael Kerrigan; all are confirmed as such and detailed in the filmography below. At various stages in August 1916 the company also announced that they had other films in production or about to go into production. Those named were: *The Upstart*, *Blarney*, *The Irish Girl*, *Shanachies Tales* (a series), *Bye Ways of Fate*, *Treasure Trove*, *Willie Reilly*, *The Girl from the Golden Vale* ("Films that draw"), *Irish Jarvey's Tales*, *Blarney Romance*, *The Irish Girl* (a romance), and *Treasure Trove* ("New Irish Films"). With a total of eleven additional films and a series, their ambition was evident as they embarked on their first year of operation.

The destruction of their first offices in Henry Street during the Easter Rising was a significant setback. Reports in the first issue of *The Irish Limelight* in January 1917 state that the "Company's first efforts were lost in the Dublin fire" ("What the Irish Film Co."), suggesting that at least one film was made and had been on the premises at that time. Notwithstanding the rocky start the company quickly recovered and, by June 1916, they had made their first film: *O'Neil of the Glen*, directed by Kerrigan and starring Bryan Magowan, Nora Clancy, Fred O'Donovan, J. M. Carré, Justice Smith, and Kerrigan himself. These actors, with Kathleen Murphy and Valentine Roberts, would become the core cast for the films made over the next two years and most were Abbey Theatre actors. The film was screened for the press, and there was enthusiastic support for the new initiative ("Irish Film Production"). There was a sense that Ireland's having its own film industry was long overdue.

O'Neil of the Glen concerns the intertwining fates of two families: the O'Neils (landowners) and the Tremaines (solicitors). Tremaine (J. M. Carré) kills O'Neil (who according to best recorded evidence was most likely played by Justice Smith) after the discovery of the fact that he has defrauded the landowner. Without knowing who the murderer is, O'Neil's son Don (Bryan Magowan) vows vengeance on the killer. Greaves (Fred O'Donovan) discovers Tremaine's secret and uses it to become engaged to Tremaine's daughter Nola (Nora Clancy) against her wishes, as she has fallen in love with Don O'Neil after he saved her life. Desperately Greaves attempts to kill Don O'Neil and reveals his knowledge of what happened to her father to Nola. When she discloses this to Don the couple is ultimately united. Although the film was warmly received at this press launch it did not get a public release until the August when it had its public premiere at the Bohemian Picture Theatre, on August 7, 1916.

The film was based on a successful novel by M. T. Pender. This fact and because it was the first film produced by an indigenous film company likely ensured its positive reception in Ireland. The story is filled with twists and turns and melodramatic events typical of the contemporary novel, and

it is reasonable to believe that the narrative was fast-paced and engaging. The actors, although working on their first feature film, were nonetheless experienced stage actors and likely gave very good performances. It is most probable that the settings were well filmed and the action skilfully staged because those aesthetic features were to become a notable feature of subsequent films by the Film Company of Ireland (“With the Film Co. of Ireland”).

The choice of story for their first film is an interesting one and marks the company’s intent to be associated with Irish topics and Irish stories, and particularly stories by Irish writers. M. T. Pender’s novel *O’Neil of the Glen* was a dramatic and action-filled love story. Duplicitous solicitors, vengeful sons, evil blackmailers, and women whose lives were dominated by the male characters representing all three set types were standard tropes of many national melodramatic narratives at the time. The Film Company of Ireland might have chosen to tell such a dramatic tale without reference to the novel or to an Irish writer or screenwriter. However, by choosing this specific story the company made a clear statement of their intent to base their films on already known Irish stories. In addition to taking the story from Pender’s novel, the company judiciously hired screenwriter W. J. Lysaght to work on the adaptation. The company was also actively advertising for screenwriters at the period, emphasising that the focus should be on Irish stories. An advertisement that was frequently published definitely signalled the urgency and conviction of their ambitions: “Wanted. Scenarios, preferably Irish atmosphere. Prompt payment for accepted work.” (Miscellaneous). The placing of these notices unambiguously indicates both the company’s professional approach to filmmaking and its commitment to making films about Irish life.

As the first indigenous fiction film company in Ireland, it was warmly welcomed by the Irish press. There was a desire on the part of the print media to have a film company that would represent Ireland accurately. This was best described in the first issue of *The Irish Limelight* in January 1917 where they indicate the benefits of such an enterprise:

By means of the film, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the sea coast, the cities, the country and the people can be shown in their usual avocations, living their lives, enjoying their pastimes, combating their troubles and meeting destiny in each particular country’s own way. It was indeed, time for a respectable, responsible picture industry to make a start in Ireland. (“What the Irish Film Co.”)

That start at a “respectable, responsible picture industry” had been made by the Film Company of Ireland in 1916. There is also an indication here, and in other accounts, that it was time that Ireland had its own film industry and there were aspirational expressions that the Film Company of Ireland would be the institution to provide that industry. Furthermore, there was approval that the company uses Irish actors, directors and stories, and a corresponding hope and belief that the creative combination would finally lead to a more accurate representation of Irishness on the screen. For

example, the *Kerry News* journal called their films “truly representative of this country and its people” (*Kerry News*) a sentiment that was echoed in newspapers around the country. In response to *O’Neil of the Glen* the *Irish Examiner* celebrated the nation’s finally having a film company “whose one object is to show Irish life in its true perspective, without grotesque exaggeration, or what is just as bad, giving an unreal picture of it, even when the intention is friendly to the country and the people. The Film Company of Ireland are to be congratulated on their enterprise in photographing Irish works acted by Irish men and women amidst Irish surroundings” (“O’Neil of the Glen”). The strong response to the depiction of Irishness on screen by Irish actors in local stories in national settings was further endorsed by the ways in which these films would counteract the various negative stereotypical representations of the country in other contemporary film and print media. Writing on this matter *The Irish Limelight* stated that:

The Company has its mission; its work is not only to entertain with Irish humour, legend and story - the purpose of the Company is to make Ireland known to the rest of the world as she has never been known before; to let outside people realise that we have in Ireland other things than the dudeen, buffoon, knee breeches and brass buckles. (“What the Irish Film Co. is doing”)

The film also got a very good review in *The Bioscope*, the British trade journal for cinema owners and managers. The review was particularly impressed by the acting, and spoke of its naturalistic style, something that the Abbey actors had been praised for in their stage performances. Its review stated that “each distinctive part is played with singularly realistic naturalness”, singling out Nora Clancy, J. M. Kerrigan, Fred O’Donovan and J. M. Carré. The review also noted that “The scenes were most excellently chosen and quite perfectly filmed” (“The Bioscope”). As a documented review, this reflection is particularly useful for historians today. Because of the absence of the film the commentary might be seen as less biased than the reviews from the Irish press, the British press, and especially the British trade press who had no vested interest in the success of an Irish film company and therefore were less likely to be biased in offering a positive review to its début.

The company initially made their films in Dublin or in the Wicklow mountains. *O’Neil of the Glen* was quickly followed by *The Miser’s Gift* which also had a private release at the Dame Street Picture House on the August 17. This two-reel film was most probably directed by J. M. Kerrigan, who also starred as the eponymous miser, Old Dolan, who “thinks of nothing but his crock of gold” (*The Irish Times*). His daughter Eileen (probably played by Nora Clancy) is wooed by a “handsome young boatman” (Fred O’Donovan) (*The Liberator*). From extant descriptions of the film in the press, it appears that the story involves the young couple having to overcome the father’s opposition to the romance, and that the materialistic father has to learn how to love his gold less. Other members of the cast were Brian Magowan, Kathleen Murphy, Valentine Roberts and

J. M. Carré. For their second film this was most ambitious: not only was it a two-reeler, but it also daringly ventured towards a supernatural turn that might have compromised the integrity of its naturalism by featuring leprechauns. *The Irish Times* reviewed and praised the film, adding:

It is agreeable to have pictures such as this, preserving a genuinely Irish atmosphere and that inherent charm which is to be found in Irish life. The sight, for instance, of lepracauns [*sic*] and other little people who live in legend, disporting themselves in a fairy fort is a feature which is surely pleasing to Irish eyes. (*The Irish Times*)

From existing copies of the original cast list it is likely that these characters were played by Magowan, Murphy, Roberts, and Carré. This was a very ambitious and unusual approach for a film company who were determined to represent Irish life as it truly was on screen. The inclusion of leprechauns in their second film would seem at first glance to embrace the type of Irish stereotypes depicted by their American and British counterparts, and it shines an interesting light on the type of films that the company considered open to the possibility of offering a specific kind of “Irish” disposition. To understand this apparent disconnection between the desire for an authentic representation of Irish life on screen and the inclusion of leprechauns and “other little people” in their second film, it is important to draw attention to the judicious use of the word “legend” in the review. The film was praised for depicting the mythical and legendary “beings” of Irish folklore. The Celtic revival reignited a significant interest in traditional Irish legends and many new stories had been published that included the more supernatural entities of the national mythology. A typical example of this was *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (1910) published by Lady Augusta Gregory of the Abbey Theatre. In their second film the company was delivering what it believed to be an identifiable Irish story by including creatures of Irish legend in a way that might align the identity of the tale with the Celtic revival, thus indicating their aspiration to produce culturally credible works. By featuring leprechauns in their second film it is likely that the Film Company of Ireland was not only connecting itself strongly to its Irish cultural and folk heritage, but that it was also reclaiming the depiction of these mythical beings from the stereotypical depictions and negative associations that were a part of British and American films, sketches, plays, illustrations, and cartoons. A comment by Godfrey Kilroy writing as “Paddy” in the Ireland column in *The Bioscope* can perhaps shed some light on this. He states that “Their second picture, ‘The Miser’s Gift’ is greatly in advance of the first as regards the quality, and if this company stick to their guns they should still be well in the front rank of British producers” (“All Irish Films”). This is high praise from an influential trade journal, and the fact that it doesn’t mention legendary beings is significant: it appreciates the film as professionally made and indicative of possible longevity and the future success of the company.

An Unfair Love Affair was the fourth film the company released, and it too featured a being from another realm. In this film, the main character,

Nora (most likely played by Nora Clancy), seeks advice from the “Boola” or “little image” when courted by two men as to which she should accept as a suitor (“Davison’s announcement”). A renewed use of imaginary beings in the second of its first four films invites the consideration that the company had been using trick photography to render these images of fairy folk on screen. It would be consistent with the ambitions of the company that they would experiment in this way. Given that they began with such enthusiasm for filmmaking, that they recruited the best actors in the country, that they recovered so quickly from the destructive fire in their original premises in Henry Street, it is not impossible that they were also experimenting with form and technology in their first films. That this mechanical testing was standard practice among pioneers of the medium, which the cinematic apparatus readily facilitated, gives strength to the hypothesis.

The other films made in this productive first year can be divided into the Dublin/Wicklow films and the Kerry films, according to filming location. The initial spurt of filmmaking which seems to have been undertaken between March and August 1916 resulted in at least four productions: *O’Neil of the Glen*, *The Miser’s Gift*, *Food of Love*, and *A Woman’s Wit* all of which were made in locations in Dublin and Wicklow. At least four others have been confirmed as shot in Kerry in a very productive month between August and September 1916: *The Girl of Glenbeigh*, *The Eleventh Hour*, *Romance of Puck Fair*, and *Widow Malone*. For the only other film made in this period, *An Unfair Love Affair*, it is difficult to determine the venue of its shoot, either from reports at the time or from comparing its release with the period in which the company were in Kerry. Nevertheless, what is clear from this list of locations and films is how busy and productive the company was: not only in its first year, but in its first six months. All of the nine films we know were released by the company were made in the period up to the beginning of September 1916. This output is admirable and extraordinary from a new company with no prior experience of the craft or mechanics of the industry.

The move of filming locations from Dublin and Wicklow to Kerry was most likely brought about by the Irish weather. While there are reports that the company was building a studio in Dublin at the end of August 1916 (“City and District”), it appears that most of their films were made on location without a studio, or at least with very little interior filming. The company had also quickly established a reputation for being very good at photographing scenery. Bearing this in mind, in the light of not having a studio, it made sense for them to prolong outdoor work when possible in Ireland, avoiding detrimental contingencies that would compromise production schedules. Thus, a move to Kerry locations would have widened the visual landscape and avoided inclement weather in the east of the country. The company settled in Muckross and filmed in and around Killarney. From the information we have we know that they filmed in Glenbeigh (*The Girl of Glenbeigh*) and around Caragh Lake between Killorglin and Glenbeigh (*The Eleventh Hour*). It is possible that they shot *Puck Fair Romance* in Killorglin. The cast and crew who made their way to

Kerry included both the Sullivans, Fitzgibbon and his wife, Kerrigan, O'Donovan, Magowan, Clancy, Carré, Justice, Murphy, and Peggy Darval who acted in some of the films. Mrs. M. Bennett, wife of the cinematographer for the company, was also among the party (*Evening Herald*). It appears that they spent almost a month in the south making between four and five films, some of them three reels in length. A report from the *Kerry News* at the beginning of September praises the company for organising a night of entertainment to raise funds for the local church. From this article we get a glimpse into how the company travelled and worked together. In these early days the whole group, including spouses and the general manager formed a tight unit, travelling together and staying in the same hotel together for many weeks ("Film Company of Ireland: Church Debt Wiped Out").

September was a busy month for the film company. Not only were they making a number of films on location in Kerry, but they were also expanding their capability in other ways, constantly on the lookout for new material, expending premises, and changing staff. In the same month they invested in the post-production side of their business by installing a film developing room in their offices at Dame Street ("All-Irish Films"). The facility would give them greater control over completed films, and in-house development and processing would remove reliance on other companies for post-production work. The strategic development also indicates that they had experts already among the company members who were capable of developing film and very likely overseeing all in-house editing. This is further evidence of the extent of the company's resources already at their disposal during the first year of production. In the same journal page where news of the developing room was announced, an advertisement was posted for a "Great Dispersal Sale" for the Jameson company, who were auctioning off their films and equipment; of which film stock development equipment was included ("Great Dispersal"). It may well have been the case that the Film Company of Ireland had an advanced opportunity to procure some of the assets of the Jameson company before auction. The developing room was built and equipped by Mr. W. James, chief operator at the Bohemian Picture Palace, continuing the professional relationship initiated with that cinema when their first film *O'Neil of the Glen* had its premiere there. In the same month they posted a renewed call for original scenarios. In this instance the request was altered slightly, but significantly, to state that any acquired "scenario should preferably have Irish atmosphere, but this is not absolutely essential" ("All-Irish Films"). The notice appeared in *The Bioscope* trade journal which, although distributed in Ireland, had a mainly English readership. This appeal to English writers may indicate not only a broadening of the type of films the film company were aiming to make in the future, but it could also indicate an awareness that, as the English film industry was more established and experienced than its Irish equivalent, there would be a greater number of professional scenario writers there.

As all of the films produced in the first year of the company are presumed lost, we must rely on descriptions in newspapers, magazines, and the trade press to determine their type and genre. There are synopses for only four of these films: *O'Neil of the Glen*, *The Miser's Gift*, *An Unfair Love Affair*, and *The Widow Malone*. Apart from these synopses, some of the films have the basic genre descriptions typical of the era listed in their advertisements. From this it would appear that the company favoured romances – of which it made two: *O'Neil of the Glen* and *The Miser's Gift* – and romantic comedies – three of which were added to their catalogue: *Food of Love*, *An Unfair Love Affair*, and *The Widow Malone*. They also produced two straight-up dramas – *The Girl of Glenbeigh* and *Romance of Puck Fair* – which were thus categorised in newspapers and trade journals. There is only incomplete information about the remaining two films, *The Eleventh Hour* and *A Woman's Wit*, so it is not possible to classify these generically at present. As indicated already, it is possible that *The Miser's Gift* and *An Unfair Love Affair* could fall into the category of “trick films”. The extant synopses are for the romances and the romantic comedies, so discretionary comparison with these provides some idea of the kind of romantic films that the company produced. In the direct romances, the romantic couple forms a force for good, leading to an affirmative outcome. The protagonists stand in marked contrast to the other characters in the film. It seems from the synopsis of both films that the young couple in each represents the future, change and generational succession, and can only survive and thrive when the older generation has either died (as in *O'Neil of the Glen*) or has adjusted its self-centred behaviour in a manner that creates a positive environment for the young couple (as in *The Miser's Gift*). The romantic comedies are, by nature, much lighter. In these, the focus is focused on the romantic aspirations of the characters, and both follow generically similar storylines. Each female lead (called Nora) has to decide between multiple suitors, and the comedy arises from the methods these suitors use to compete with each other for her attention. In *An Unfair Love Affair*, the suitors set up a situation that puts Nora in peril, requiring that the most heroic of them rescue her. In *The Widow Malone* the contest between the three suitors is only resolved when two of them retreat, inaccurately believing that Nora's fortune is lost, and deeming her unworthy. From the synopses it appears that both films also use a *deus ex machina* resolution, which allows the female leads to decide their own romantic future. In *An Unfair Love Affair*, Nora's consultation with “Boola”, her “little image”, and her subsequent refusal to choose between any of her suitors establishes the dramatic pretext for arranging the competition. In the second narrative, although we have less information about Nora, the widow Malone, we can adduce that the supposed loss of her fortune results in her being united with the best suitor.

Not only was the company busy managing the release schedule for the films in Ireland; it had also engaged the Davison's Film Sales Agency in England to arrange distribution of its films there. This agreement was established early on in the production planning. By November 1916 *The*

Bioscope announced that Davison's had been appointed "sole agents" for the distribution of the Film Company of Ireland's films in the UK. They initially offered *O'Neil of the Glen* and *The Miser's Gift* to the trade at the start of November ("The All-Irish Films"). Not much later that month *Widow Malone*, *The Food of Love*, *An Unfair Love Affair*, *O'Neil of the Glen*, and *The Miser's Gift* were already available for distribution. They screened the last of these at a trade show in their offices on November 22, 1916. At the start of 1917 further trade shows for *O'Neil of the Glen* and *The Miser's Gift* were arranged at the Scala Theatre in Liverpool and at the Walker's Theatre in Manchester. The management and business acumen of the company's directors were effective enough to ensure the early short films received ample distribution in the UK in the first year of the company's operations.

There was a break in film production from November 1916, and possibly even from October, as shorter days with less available light restricted outdoor filming in Ireland during the winter months. In this period there were two events of note which had a lasting effect on the fortunes of the film company. Co-owner of the company Henry Fitzgibbon and the group's primary film director, J. M. Kerrigan, went to America where they were to spend time consulting with people in the industry who had considerably more experience than they. The purpose of the visits was to implement strategies and efficiencies of practice that would improve business. Fitzgibbon was in America by November 1916 from where, it was reported, he was "keeping his eye open for all that is best in the studio line" ("Film Company of Ireland"). He was due to return in the new year, and the intention was that the expertise he had gained would be used to acquire an independent studio for the Film Company of Ireland. Reports indicate that a site had already been chosen at Ringsend in Dublin for the location of the studio and the company was "certainly sparing no expense to get things right" ("Film Company of Ireland"). In fact, there was a report in the *Freemans Journal* at the end of August explaining that the company had applied "for a lease of a plot of ground at the Pigeon House road for the purpose of erecting a studio thereon" ("City and District"). The decision to make their own studio in Dublin was a bold move showing that the company had long-term plans for the production of films in Ireland. Developing and equipping their own studio would allow them to film all year round, thus increasing production and focusing on maximising efficiency without the disruption of pausing from October to February when the conditions posed evident disadvantages. Any new facility for interior shooting would also afford them the opportunity of varying the types of films they made and increasing the range of scenes within individual films, in turn offering a greater prospect of story options. This preparation to open a studio is also indicative of the fact that the company had significant financial resources to fund the endeavour, and that it had aspirations to maintain steady production, if not increase output. A film studio in Dublin was a bold and unprecedented proposal. At the time there was no studio in the city and there is no evidence that one had ever existed there. Such a production facility would not only improve the quantity and range of films made by the

Film Company of Ireland, but it could also be rented to other companies and potentially initiate a productive, attractive centre for the development of a genuine Irish film industry. It is unclear if any studio was ever built but given the change in the financial fortunes of the company in 1917, it is most unlikely that the plans came to fruition. Kerrigan's trip to America was reported at the end of December and, while in one article the purpose of his visit was explained as studying "production first hand" ("Topical Work"), *The Bioscope* expected that as a result of the trip "a great improvement will be noticed in the company's productions when they start 'filming again' (*ibidem*). Kerrigan did return to Ireland in 1917, but the record is unclear as to whether he worked with the Film Company of Ireland from that point onwards.

The company was established to make films of "Irish atmosphere" and specifically to include both fiction and non-fiction productions in its repertoire. Most of the output of the company ultimately comprised fiction films, and it was for this work that it gained its reputation. However, it also made or was commissioned to make non-fiction films, beginning in 1916. The first report of such intentions came in December of that year, when *The Bioscope* stated that it had recently filmed an important GAA match ("Topical Work") as part of its turn to "topical" filmmaking. Once again, there is evidence of the company's enterprising spirit and a determination to succeed. Equal determination is evident in its resilience to extend operations as much as possible during periods of poor weather and limited winter daytime light. It is clear that the management wanted to keep making films in this period, and it would seem that such "topical films" were a good choice for maintaining filming. Live events were already set up so there was less groundwork for the company as was typically required for fiction film shooting. In cases where documentary productions were planned, a cinematographer was dispatched to the event. *The Bioscope* states that the Film Company of Ireland had "secured the sole rights to film the Gaelic football match" ("Topical Work"), indicating that the Film Company of Ireland, and not Pathé or the Topical Budget, would be in a unique position to film, edit, and distribute the item. The *Irish Independent* recorded that the GAA football final took place between Wexford and Mayo on December 17, 1916, and that Wexford emerged victorious.

The first year of operation was very successful for the Film Company of Ireland. They had some natural advantages: they were well organised and well financed with good actors and crew, and they received a warm welcome from the Irish press, cinema owners, and the public. One of the strengths of the company was its talent for, and drive towards, publicity. From the beginning they sent out creatively worded and appealing press releases and held publicity events and private screenings for the journals ("New Irish Industry"). The ability to promote their films from the outset of operations established a vertical system of operation that gave them a prominent place in Irish film culture and ensured a favourable reception for their announcements. By the end of 1916, the company had released nine films, gained a distributor for its films in England, and had begun plans for

the development of a studio for the production of its first feature-length film. It was an extremely productive and ambitious start for this new company. The signs were good that they could build on the promising enterprise and continue to make successful films over the next few years.

NOTES

Much detailed archival work on the Film Company of Ireland has been undertaken by Liam O’Leary and Denis Condon. I am grateful for the research they have done on this topic and for making this available through the Liam O’Leary Archive at the National Library, and for Denis Condon’s earlyirishcinema.com blog.

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Where confirmation is not possible from archival sources I have indicated this with an asterisk beside the director’s name.

An Unfair Love Affair (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

A Woman’s Wit (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

Food of Love (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

O’Neil of the Glen (J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

Romance of Puck Fair (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

The Eleventh Hour (J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

The Girl of Glenbeigh (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

The Miser’s Gift (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

Widow Malone (*J. M. Kerrigan, 1916)

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Veronica Johnson is an early and silent film historian. She is a council member of the *International Association for Media and History* and book review editor and co-editor of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. Previously Assistant Professor at Maynooth University and Lecturer at University of Galway, her research has appeared in *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* and is forthcoming from FRAMEWORK: The Journal of Cinema and Media, Rutgers University Press, and Manchester University Press.

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