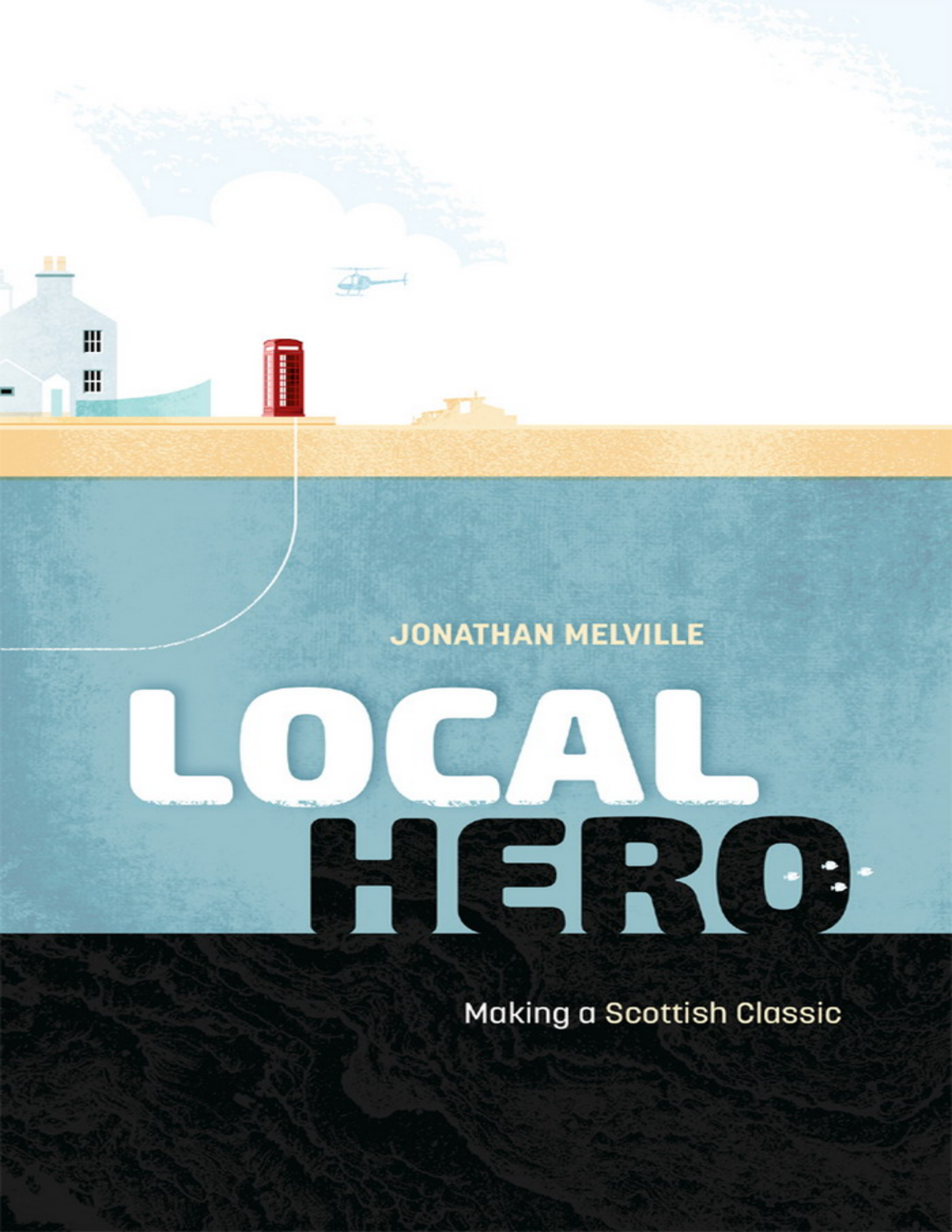




JONATHAN MELVILLE

LOCAL HERO

Making a Scottish Classic



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MAKING A SCOTTISH CLASSIC

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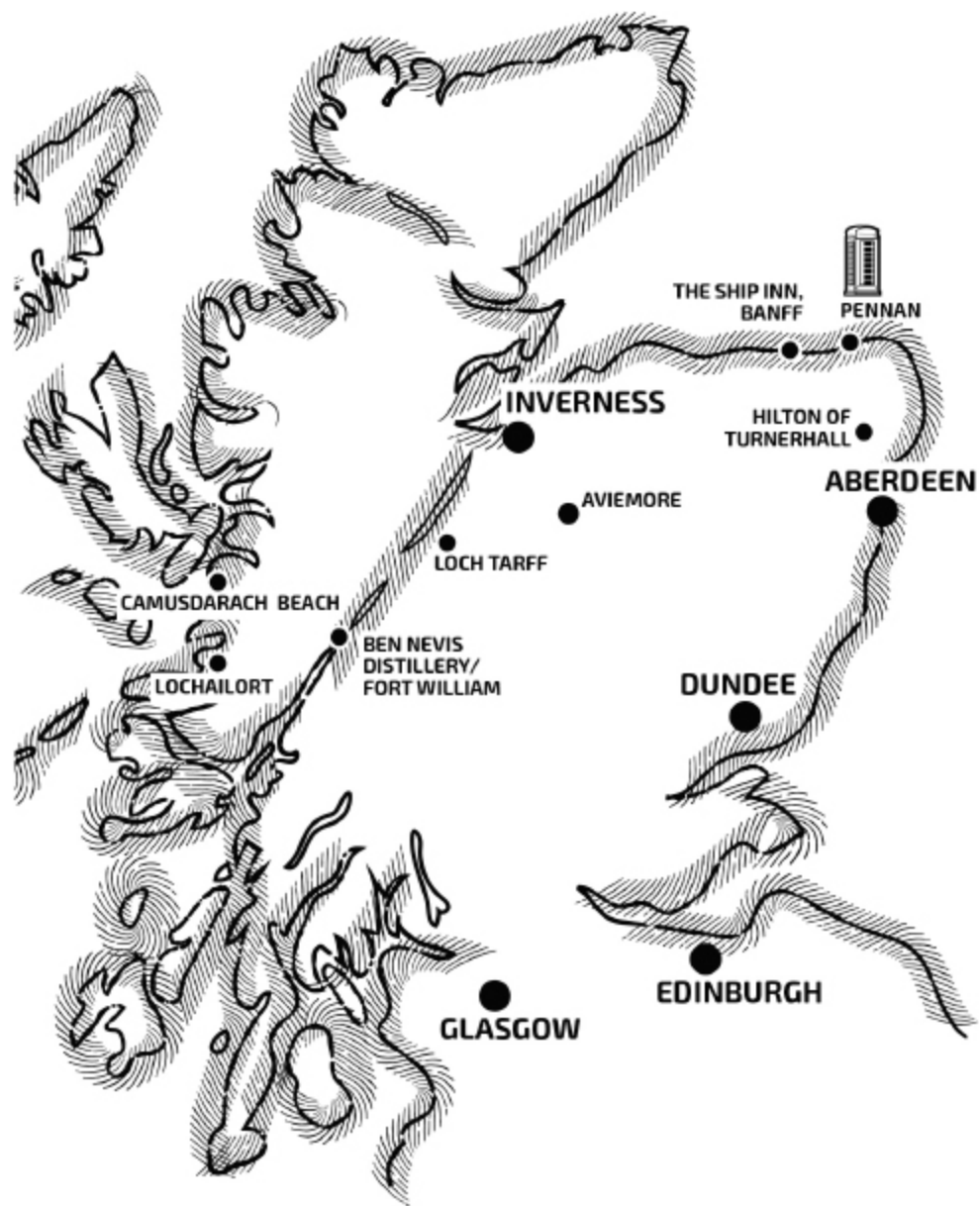
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For Iain MacColl



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Burt Lancaster, Bill Forsyth and Fulton McKay discuss a scene. © *Warner Brothers / courtesy Everett Collection*

Bill Forsyth and Burt Lancaster plan a scene as Denis Lawson stands by. © *Graham Attwood*

Front from left: Denis Lawson, Jennifer Black. *Centre from left:* Peter Capaldi, Peter Riegert, Christopher Rozyki. *Rear from left:* Burt Lancaster, Fulton Mackay. © *Warner Brothers/courtesy Everett Collection*

Local Hero poster. © *Alamy*

A fiery sunset in Pennan. *Courtesy of Fiona McRae / Focal Pennan*

The Northern Lights visible in the night sky behind Pennan's surviving phone box. *Courtesy of Monika Focht Photography, Pennan Inn BnB & Gallery*

INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH BORN AND raised in Scotland, it wasn't until I started university in the mid-1990s that I realised my home country had anything resembling a film industry.

Up until then I'd never really considered Scotland's indigenous output, happy to watch whatever our three terrestrial broadcasters, BBC, ITV, and Channel 4, offered up alongside VHS rentals from the local corner shop and the occasional visit to the cinema in Inverness, 50 miles away from my home in Golspie. For most of my teenage years, Scottish TV meant dramas such as *Tutti Frutti* and *Taggart*, comedies like *City Lights* and *Rab C. Nesbitt*, or the soap opera *Take the High Road*. By no means a bad range of programming, but if you didn't want to watch something set in Glasgow then you were pretty much out of luck.

Moving to Edinburgh in 1994, I became a regular at the Cameo and Odeon cinemas where, alongside the latest Hollywood fare, I noticed what seemed to be a never-ending stream of Scottish films appearing in the listings: the likes of *Shallow Grave* (1994), *Small Faces* (1995), *Braveheart* (1995), *Rob Roy* (1995), *Loch Ness* (1996) and *Trainspotting* (1996). Mel Gibson's history-book-trashing *Braveheart* won five Oscars and reignited Scotland's tourist industry, while Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* terrified the Tourist Board with its depiction of heroin addicts in present-day Edinburgh. They needn't have worried: *The List* put 'the radge quartet' of Ewan McGregor, Jonny Lee Miller, Robert Carlyle and Ewen Bremner on the front cover of a February '96 issue and exclaimed that 'the intoxicating film version of Irvine Welsh's modern classic . . . has more resonance in the hip, self-aware 90s than stylised "youth" films like *Shopping*'. For a few months at least, being Scottish was cool.

As aware as I was of this surge of Scottish cinema, it wasn't until I wrote an article for my course magazine that I realised most of the Scottish films I was watching weren't really Scottish at all. *Braveheart* had been made with American money and mostly filmed in Ireland, while *Trainspotting* was funded

by Channel 4 in England. Some home-grown films did receive public funding from the likes of the Glasgow Film Fund, others from the Scottish Film Production Fund, but there were strict criteria film-makers had to meet. For my first foray into film journalism, I wanted to find out why my home country was suddenly all over the big screen.

Celia Stevenson, director of Scottish Screen Locations, whose remit was to market Scotland as a filming location, told me, 'Script is always what drives a film. If you don't have a good script, you don't have anything. *Rob Roy* was such a script. We also have the talent, the crews and facilities to back that up. There is a genuine want to come and film in this country; to put Scotland on the film map, as it were.' Stevenson opened my eyes to a world of Scottish film-making I'd never considered before, explaining that as well as our incredible locations being a cinematographer's dream, our long summer days meant more hours available for filming, while the famous Scottish weather lent a unique quality of light to productions. Accessibility was also a major plus, with film crews able to arrive at Glasgow airport and be in the heart of the Highlands, the Borders, or on a remote island in a matter of hours.

I quoted *Trainspotting* producer Andrew MacDonald as highlighting the quality of Scottish technicians, stating they were 'some of the best in the country, partly because they all know each other and work together all the time. They're like a team.' I also discovered that change was coming in the shape of Scottish Screen, a new body combining Scottish Screen Locations, the Scottish Film Production Fund and the Scottish Screen Council. Meanwhile, the National Lottery had awarded over £3 million in development money to bring two Scottish novels to the screen (Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings* and Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*), along with John Byrne's play *The Slab Boys*, though only the latter ever made it into production.

But would the rise in Scotland-based productions translate to an actual Scottish film industry, one which didn't rely so heavily on outside companies basing themselves here for a few days or weeks and which might even be self-funded? I ended my article pondering whether such activity was a sign that, unlike that classic 'Scottish' film *Brigadoon* (1954), our film industry wouldn't soon vanish into the Highland mist.

While my two-page article was never meant to be a deep dive into the Scottish film industry, and it would be another decade until I started writing professionally about film and TV, today I can see how rooted in the moment it was, avoiding any mention of the sector's history and focusing on the future. For a 20-year-old student it was probably only right that I was thinking of where things were going rather than where they'd been, but over the next few years I watched or rewatched older films, including 1949's *Whisky Galore!*, 1973's *The Wicker Man*, 1985's *Restless Natives* and a couple of titles from director Bill Forsyth (1980's *Gregory's Girl* and 1983's *Local Hero*), realising that the past really did inform the present.

The more I saw actors such as Jimmy Yuill, Alex Norton, Barbara Rafferty, Rikki Fulton, Caroline Guthrie, Jonathan Watson and Dave Anderson crop up in the likes of *Doctor Finlay* (1993–96), *The Tales of Para Handy* (1994–95), *Hamish Macbeth* (1995–97), and the ever-present *Taggart*, the more I realised that while Ewan McGregor was off fighting stormtroopers in the *Star Wars* prequels and Bobby Carlyle was taking on James Bond in *The World is Not Enough* (1999), a kind of unofficial repertory company was keeping the home fires burning. They were the public face of a screen industry powered by writers, producers, directors, technicians, editors, sound engineers, runners and dozens of other experts in their field, names the viewing public doesn't usually recognise. If they've done their job right then they're invisible, their list of credits only of interest to the next broadcaster or production company.

Just as the 1990s were about to give way to a new millennium, articles appeared in the press about another film from Bill Forsyth, a sequel to *Gregory's Girl* called *Gregory's Two Girls*, which would reunite him with John Gordon Sinclair. The articles focused on Forsyth's history of making feature films, which stretched back to the late 1970s, mentioning how he'd funded 1979's *That Sinking Feeling* without relying on the equivalent of Scottish Screen or the National Lottery.

I soon realised that I'd missed a major piece of information in my 1996 article, and that any analysis of the current film industry had to include at least a passing reference to Bill Forsyth; though, in reality, books could be written on his contribution to Scotland's film and TV sector. I'd failed to note that the Scottish Film Production Fund was founded just a few years after Forsyth's

twin successes with *That Sinking Feeling* and *Gregory's Girl* had raised the profile of Scottish cinema. Soon after that he was making *Local Hero* on a budget of £3 million. I'd missed the fact that, thanks to their work on Forsyth's films, particularly *That Sinking Feeling*, many of the crew were then able to find work on bigger productions, while the largely amateur cast could also go on to work professionally in other TV series or features.

Of course, it didn't matter to the handful of people who had read my original article that I'd glossed over this information, but as the years went by I was keen to find out more about Forsyth's work and importance to my country's cultural history. By 2008, 12 years after my first attempt at film journalism, the much-anticipated Scottish production boom of the late '90s had never materialised; though TV shows and films continued to be made each year, many funded by Scottish Screen, there was still no sign of a dedicated film studio in Scotland, despite numerous newspaper reports suggesting viability studies were being commissioned every few years.

In February 2008, I attended a 25th anniversary screening of *Local Hero* at the Glasgow Film Festival, seizing on the opportunity to hear stories from members of the cast and crew and to watch the film on the big screen. 'Just to warn you, I always start crying when the music starts at the end,' said a woman in the row behind me to her friends before Festival co-director Allan Hunter introduced Iain Smith (*Local Hero's* associate producer), Roger Murray-Leach (production designer), Denis Lawson (Gordon Urquhart), Jennifer Black (Stella Urquhart), Tam Dean Burn (Roddy), Jonathan Watson (Jonathan) and Dave Anderson (Fraser) to the stage.

We heard about building fake churches, filming inside distilleries, Hollywood stars dropping their trousers, and how the cast and crew spent weeks on end in idyllic surroundings eating the finest seafood. The making of *Local Hero* sounded not only like a dream job, but a dream full stop.

Fast-forward another five years, and by 2013 I'd found myself working with the team behind Screen Machine, an articulated lorry which doubled as Scotland's only mobile cinema, touring the Highlands and Islands screening the latest films for communities which couldn't easily make it to a bricks-and-mortar cinema. For the cinema's 15th anniversary, we'd organised a screening of *Local Hero* in Mallaig to coincide with the film's 30th anniversary, close to

Camusdarach Beach where much of the film was shot. In attendance would be Bill Forsyth and his long-time friend and colleague Iain Smith, making it a dream event for Screen Machine's lead operator Iain MacColl who, along with Neil MacDonald, kept the lorry on the road in all weathers.

So it was, on a wet November evening in 2013, that Forsyth and Smith joined us along with 80 film fans to watch *Local Hero* on the big screen, followed by a Q&A session at which I was finally able to put the kind of questions to the pair that I'd long been wanting to ask. For more than 40 minutes we were able to discuss all aspects of the film's production, from casting Peter Riegert to shooting mist on a Highland road, from the real fate of Trudi the rabbit to what the film really meant to its director. By sheer coincidence it turned out that the date we'd chosen to show the film was the centenary of Burt Lancaster's birth, lending an extra poignancy to the night.

A few years ago, with *Local Hero's* 40th anniversary fast approaching, I decided it was time to look at the film in more detail, partly to make up for my own lack of research in 1996, but mainly because for me it's undoubtedly the best film to have been made in Scotland by a Scottish director and with a predominately Scottish cast and crew, though whether it's technically a 'Scottish' film depends on your point of view and is something I'm happy to debate over a 42-year-old whisky in the MacAskill Arms.

If I'm being honest, I have no idea when I first watched *Local Hero*. For many of us, it's just always been there, part of Scottish culture, ingrained in our collective psyche. There's no single thing that makes it work for me, just a combination of intelligent writing, the perfect cast, incredible locations, and something else I can't quite put my finger on that's only present in certain films which burrow deep inside you and refuse to budge.

Thanks to the generosity of many of the women and men who were involved in the making of the film and with Bill Forsyth's wider career, I've pieced together as complete a record of the production as I could. Thanks then to the following for taking the time to chat over the phone or by Zoom: Matthew Binns, Jennifer Black, Michael Bradsell, David Brown, Tam Dean Burn, Alan Clark, Paddy Higson, Denis Lawson, Roger Murray-Leach, Peter Riegert, Alistair Scott, Jenny Seagrove, John Gordon Sinclair, Iain Smith, Anne Sopel, Frank Walsh, Jonathan Watson, Arthur Wicks, Jimmy Yuill and Sandra Voe.

I've also transcribed my 2013 interview with Bill Forsyth, and you'll read excerpts from it throughout the book.

Other interviews have been culled from newspaper, magazine and TV archives, plus a few reference books. If I've not interviewed someone who's still alive then it's not for want of trying; it's either because they've declined, not replied to emails, or I'm unable to find their contact details. Where possible, I've still tried to represent their side of the story via archive interviews.

Part oral history, part scene-by-scene breakdown, I've focused on trying to tell the personal stories behind the production, sometimes going into intricate technical details but mostly focusing on what it meant to be on set in Houston and Scotland in 1982 as *Local Hero* went from script to screen. For those of us who couldn't be there, this is as close as we're going to get. So, please keep the noise down, the first assistant director is about to shout . . . 'Action!'

Jonathan Melville
Edinburgh
October 2022

ONE

LEARNING THE ROPES

‘Film-making is a pretty grubby occupation.’

Bill Forsyth

GLASGOW HAS ALWAYS been a city in love with the cinema. By 1939, Glaswegians were said to be the UK’s most-enthusiastic cinema-goers, making their way to the likes of the Majestic, the Govanhill or the Calder to watch the latest Cary Grant, Jimmy Cagney or Bette Davis movie an average of 51 times a year, compared to 35 times for the rest of Scotland and a paltry 21 in England.

Just six years later, things had changed dramatically, the war in Europe having closed many picture houses or halted the building of new ones. When war ended in 1945 and a populace tired of years of austerity embraced the opportunity to be once more entertained in the safety of their local picture palace, cinema-owners’ fears that their industry was mortally wounded proved unfounded; 1946 saw more tickets sold than at any time in the history of the medium.

That same year, on 29 July, William David Forsyth was born in the Whiteinch area of Glasgow, north of the River Clyde and close to the Clydeholm shipyard where his father worked as a plumber. It’s unclear how often young Bill was taken to the local cinema to watch the latest cartoons or serials, but it is known that, while he was a pupil at Knightswood School, the

headmaster surprised his pupils one day with a screening of Jacques Tati's *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (1953). The film's numerous sight gags had a lasting effect on the boy. 'I didn't even mind that it was in black and white and a foreign language – almost all of the fun in it was visual,' revealed Forsyth to Gerald Peary. 'I've seen *Hulot* lots of times since.'

Keen on becoming a writer when he left school aged 17, Forsyth's plans changed in January 1964 when he answered an advert in the local paper placed by documentary film-maker Stanley Russell. It read, 'Lad required for film production company, Maryhill.' Forsyth was soon making his way to Russell's Thames and Clyde Films alongside a school friend, the pair ending up with back-to-back interviews for the job. While the initial questions seemed easy enough to answer – 'Can you handle a broom?' 'Can you use a lawnmower,' 'Can you drive a car?' (Forsyth explained that he couldn't, but he could wash them) – the most important part of the interview was when he was asked to move a heavy piece of equipment and managed to do so. Forsyth notes that it 'was in the old days of the one-man documentary film companies. One man and a boy, and I was that boy.'

Successfully beating his friend to the position, Forsyth started at Thames and Clyde on Monday, 10 February 1964 on a salary of £3 a week, Stanley Russell looking after the filming of a series of short, sponsored films while his young apprentice 'had to do virtually everything [the boss] didn't'. Forsyth took on the job of assistant editor, assistant cameraman, assistant sound recordist, or whatever was required on a particular project, the pair travelling the length and breadth of Scotland's Central Belt between Glasgow and Fife, filming everything that moved, 'and if it refused to move we panned across it, or tilted up it . . . what we made were glorified magic-lantern shows, pictures with words'.

Forsyth's introduction to screenwriting came just a month into the job, when Russell asked him to write a script for the Bank of Scotland called *Order to Pay*. 'They were trying to encourage people to open cheque accounts in 1964, so it was quite pioneering, I suppose,' explained Forsyth to Allan Hunter in 1990.

The young man's interest in cinema blossomed during this period, regular visits to Glasgow's Cosmo cinema (now the Glasgow Film Theatre) and their

regular screenings of European films such as Louis Malle's *Le Feu Follet* (1963) and Jean Luc-Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) being of particular interest. 'You would go around in a leather jacket, smoking Gaulloise [sic] and trying to pretend you were French. I suppose it was a revelation to find that movies could be different to the run of the mill thing that would turn up at the Odeon, Anniesland.'

After learning the ropes at Thames and Clyde, Forsyth was tempted into making his own experimental films in the late 1960s, including *Waterloo* (1968) and *Language* (1969), explaining that the latter was 'a human story that wasn't told in dramatic narrative but in a psychological monologue. There was lots of talking in it, incident, bits of poetry, information and what you were supposed to get from it was a sense of human loss and distance; emotional, physical and temporal distance.'

Waterloo was entered into the Edinburgh International Film Festival where it was met with audience apathy, many patrons walking out before it had finished, prompting Forsyth to claim that it 'was the first moment I felt like a film-maker because I had actually moved an audience. If not emotionally or anything else, I had actually moved them out of their seats.' Meeting Hollywood director Samuel Fuller at a festival party and describing *Waterloo* to him, the American took a swing at Forsyth, shouting, 'What an insult to your audience!' According to the director, Fuller's response helped 'nudge' him into narrative cinema.

Soon after, Forsyth joined film-makers Eddie McConnell and Laurence Henson at International Film Associates (IFA) Scotland, a company producing sponsored films for the likes of the Central Office of Information and the Children's Film Foundation, and it was during his time there that he met a young man called Iain Smith, who was interested in starting a career in film-making. 'They were generally accepted as the most successful film company in Scotland at that time,' explains Smith, noting that there were others who made 'pretty tedious stuff', but that McConnell and Henson had 'a kind of edge' to them.

Keen to get some experience with the film-makers, Smith visited them in their basement office and came face to face with Bill Forsyth. 'Bill was standing there, and I was thinking, *He's a real editor*, and he was like, *Who's this prick*

that's just walked in? And so it proved to be, because I started to comment over his shoulder, "Wouldn't it be better to make that cut just a wee bit sooner?" which he took very measuredly, but he's never forgotten. To this day he'll say, "You came in and told me how to do my job," which is what I've spent my life doing, telling people how to do their job better.'

Smith is referring to the fact that today he's one of the UK's most sought after producers, with credits including *Children of Men* (2006) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), but as the 1970s rolled around he was still trying to find his feet in the film industry, accepting a place at the London Film School. Bill Forsyth soon followed him south for a short stint as one of the inaugural intake of students at the newly established National Film and Television School in 1971, where he claimed he 'lorded it over the Cambridge and Oxford graduates and the Commonwealth cousins who hadn't seen an Arri or a Steenbeck before'.

Leaving the school before the course ended, Forsyth returned to Glasgow in 1972 and teamed up with his old IFA Scotland colleague Charles Gormley to establish their own company, Tree Films, their aim being to make Scotland-based feature films. In reality, the three men spent the next six years producing sponsored films as part of the Films of Scotland collection, a series of 150 shorts which charted the changing face of Britain from 1955 to 1982. The films were made under the auspices of the second Films of Scotland Committee (itself established by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry), representing all branches of the film industry, tourism and local and national administration and manufacturing. Tree Films produced films such as the Forsyth-directed *Islands of the West* (1972), a 27-minute film looking at the scenic beauty of the Hebrides, and *Shapes in the Water* (1974), a Fulton Mackay-narrated look at Highland boat-building.

Following his time in London, Iain Smith also made his way back to Glasgow, joining Forsyth at Tree Films, which he recalls being inside 'a little shed at the back of a Park Circus building. As far as I can remember, I was the only one with any common sense. Charlie was a wonderful man who loved to talk about Hollywood, but running a company? No. Bill? No. Bill was idiosyncratic to a T. So, I was the one saying, "This month we spent £520 more than we did last month, this is not a good sign." We got to know each

other really well there and we made quite a few of these sponsored documentaries; anyone who wanted a film about anything, we were up for it. I would do the budgets, get the money, and make sure we were spending less than we got. Bill and I became friends. He trusted me, as much as he trusted anybody.'

Despite being paid to work at his craft, Forsyth revealed in a 1982 episode of BBC Scotland's long-running *Current Affairs* series that he was never very happy as a documentary film-maker, though he admitted it was a useful training ground. 'You can learn your craft, because if you're making a film about something that isn't inherently interesting, then by the efforts that you make to make it interesting, you're learning. We had to make films about marine engines, and not very exotic ones. They were only on things like tug boats; they were kind of backup-generator diesel engines. So, if you've got to apply your mind to thinking of ways of making that interesting, you're actually exercising your film-making brain in quite a good way.'

Forsyth looked back at his time at Tree Films as 'virtually a hand-to-mouth existence', going on to state that 'money is the perennial problem in the film industry, simply because making films is an expensive business'. In programme notes for the 1979 Edinburgh International Film Festival programme, Forsyth wrote that a few years earlier his career as a documentary film-maker was 'in a bit of a mess. I had always felt slightly ill-at-ease in the role, although I liked the costume – the tweedy jacket and the wellingtons and the expensive anorak. The crunch came when I found myself up the mighty Amazon River with a film crew on a hunting expedition, up to my scalp in debt.'

The director had travelled to South America to document a joint British and Ecuadorian expedition investigating the claims of Erich von Däniken's book, *Gold of the Gods*, in which the author claimed that cave formations were created by alien life forms using laser technology. Said Forsyth, 'The flying saucers didn't materialise, and neither did the final payment of £15,000 from the "Producer". Luckily we had insisted on return air tickets before we left Britain. They were safely wrapped up in plastic bags to protect them from rapid decay in the tropical moistness.' Back home in Scotland, the director sat in the cutting room hacking 20,000 feet of film into 1979's *The Legend of Los*

Tayos for Thames Television, realising that he ‘couldn’t be any worse off’ if he was making a feature film.

Glasgow-born actor Bill Paterson knew Forsyth during his documentary film-making days, explaining that it was while ‘he was making films with Charlie Gormley doing programmes about the herring industry and Harris tweed, as Scottish film-makers did in those days. Because of the success of the theatre revival in and around shows such as *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, which I was in during the mid-’70s as part of the 7:84 group, there was a great sense of Scottish theatre showing what was happening at the time in Scotland and in people’s lives. Bill said, “We’ve got to do what you guys have done on stage: we’ve got to get the stories about our lives today in the here and now. We can’t sit and wait for the herring-industry board to give us another job, we’ve got to do it.”

Forsyth wasn’t alone in his ambitions, and it was in 1976 that he and other Scottish film-makers gathered at Film Bang, a two-day exhibition and conference held in Glasgow to debate issues of funding and create a sense of identity within the sector. A printed directory of the same name was published as part of the event, listing 11 production companies and 66 Scottish film personnel, from animators to videotape producers. In her introduction to the directory, Lynda Myles, director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, wrote: ‘Scotland at present is on the threshold of great change . . . if Scottish cinema is to have any relevance to life in Scotland, a feature film industry must be established.’

An injection of youth

Desperate to find a way into making feature films, Iain Smith explains that he and Forsyth ‘sort of cartwheeled along’ through the early stages of an idea called ‘Singles’, a story about football and young love. Looking for help to write a character-driven screenplay, Forsyth sought out help from the Glasgow Youth Theatre, located in the Dolphin Arts Centre in the Bridgeton area of the city. At the time, he felt that getting to know the Youth Theatre would be ‘a crafty way’ to get some experience working with actors, writing that ‘the Arts

Council will on the odd occasion give a painter or sculptor money to make a film. But would they subsidise the likes of me to spend some time at the theatre? Or maybe even make a little film? Here's a clue to the answer; painting is an ART, and film-making is not, Arts Council-wise. I didn't figure that getting to know the Youth Theatre would change my life, but it did. Up until then, I had been more interested in film than in people. Now the balance is better.'

Forsyth would arrive on a Friday to observe everything from play rehearsals to improvisational sessions at the Dolphin from afar, too shy to reveal he was mulling over the idea of writing a film script. When he was properly introduced to the amateur actors, they began improvising scenes which would end up in a script called 'Gregory's Girl', bringing the perspective of young people to his story. One of those young people who joined the Youth Theatre around this time was Gordon Sinclair, who in later years would go by the name of John Gordon Sinclair. On his first day at the Dolphin, Sinclair found the actors rehearsing a scene featuring a nurse from the 'Gregory's Girl' script. 'I remember going in and standing at the side of the hall and they said, "We're just doing a scene from a film this guy's writing." Rab Buchanan was playing Gregory.'

The story being developed revolved around the central character of teenager Gregory Underwood, a football-mad schoolboy whose experience with girls is limited until he's introduced to a new recruit on his school football team, Dorothy. As Gregory attempts to get closer to Dorothy, he's ultimately introduced to another girl, Susan, who is keen on him, the pair going on to become a couple.

For Sinclair, the Youth Theatre was less about becoming an actor and more about meeting like-minded people. 'I was really into this Canadian rock band Rush, and the very first day I went along there was a guy wearing a Rush T-shirt. Every time I asked anyone else in Glasgow, they didn't know them, and here was this guy in this shirt and that could only mean one thing: that he'd been to the concert. It was a place where people thought like me. It was never the acting; it was to do with being in a group. I was interested in school plays, and it wasn't that I'd watched loads of TV or movies. It was much more organic than that with no real thought process. I know Bill wanted to make

movies but couldn't get the money together and he was happy working with a bunch of kids interested in mucking around and theatre.'

With the 'Gregory's Girl' script completed, all Forsyth had to do was find the money to make it, estimating he needed £29,000 to film it on 16mm. 'Film-making is a pretty grubby occupation,' he wrote in 1979. 'Every day you encounter liars and cheats and two-timers. I love it. Setting up a film is probably the most fun of all. Trying to find money for a locally produced feature film in Scotland seemed very much an impossibility. With no track record to tout, no eager audience to boast of, we were in pretty bad shape.' Forsyth shared his '90-page humdinger' with the British Film Institute (BFI) Production Board and spent the next two years in meetings to discuss his plans, revealing that 'on different occasions they loved it, hated it, and were indifferent to it. In the end their hatred and indifference triumphed, and I didn't get the money, not even after I had found one-third of the budget from TV.'

'The Scottish Film Council were playing hard to get about the £1,500 we were asking for, and this enraged Bill,' adds Iain Smith. 'They were the body in Scotland supposed to support film-making and creativity and they were going, "Aye, well, it lacks a bit of enchantment."' Dismayed by the response to 'Gregory's Girl', Smith secured work as unit production manager on *Death Watch*, a new film from French director Bertrand Tavernier starring Harvey Keitel which was to be filmed in Glasgow in 1979, while other local crew and actors were also able to gain experience on the production. Soon after, Smith accepted an offer to meet a team of film-makers in London who were in the early stages of developing a new project led by producer David Puttnam, while Forsyth remained in Glasgow.

Annoyed by the negative reaction to his 'Gregory's Girl' script, Forsyth returned to the Youth Theatre and suggested they make a different film. 'I felt duty bound to deliver in some way or other [and] I had this determination to show the world we could get by without them. So, we came up with the idea of *That Sinking Feeling*.' The film-maker knew the boundaries of his replacement project. With no budget, he'd have to rely on his cast of unknown actors, keeping filming close to the Youth Theatre to save on transport costs.