

How Green Was My Valley

US : 1941 : dir. John Ford : 20th Century Fox : 118 min
prod: Darryl F Zanuck : scr: Philip Dunne : dir.ph.: Arthur C Miller
[Roddy McDowall](#)
Walter Pidgeon; Maureen O'Hara; Donald Crisp; Sara Allgood; Anna Lee; John Loder;
Ann Todd; Patric Knowles; Barry Fitzgerald; Rhys Williams; Irving Pichel

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2674b	15.5	17	30	3,769	3	7	3	3	7	Yes	June 2003

**“ “What are you? A man or a saint?
I don't want him. I want you! ”
Her desire scorched both their lives
with the vicious breath of scandal! ”**



No vicious breath of scandal for Roddy McDowall and Walter Pidgeon however. For the boy and, to a lesser extent, his family, Pidgeon represents broader horizons, education, upward mobility. Source: Roddy McDowall tribute site



They don't do things by halves, those Welshmen. The Morgan clan – high, wide and handsome.

Source: indeterminate

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Moving drama from Richard Llewellyn's story of Welsh coal miners, centring on Crisp's large, close-knit family. Beautifully filmed, lovingly directed, winner of five Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actor (Crisp), Best Cinematography (Arthur Miller) and Best Art Director. Screenplay by Philip Dunne. **** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Warm drama about Welsh mineworkers in which Crisp's large, close family is central. Beautifully filmed, exceptionally well directed, winner of five Academy Awards. **** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Memories of childhood in a Welsh mining village. Prettified and unconvincing but dramatically very effective tearjerker in the style which lasted from Cukor's **"DAVID COPPERFIELD"** to **"THE GREEN YEARS"**. High production values here add a touch of extra class, turning the result into a Hollywood milestone despite its intrinsic inadequacies. (The unseen narrator was Irving

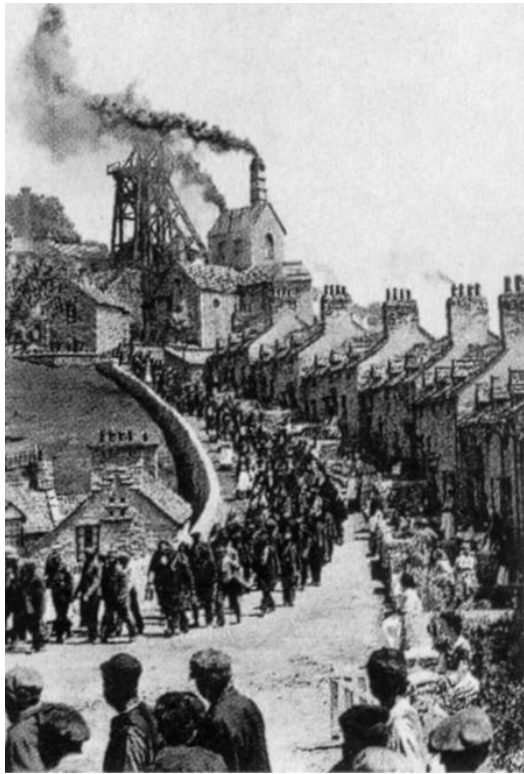
Pichel.) Academy Awards: Best Picture; John Ford; Arthur Miller; Donald Crisp. Nominations: Philip Dunne; Alfred Newman; Sara Allgood. *** "

"Perfection of cinematic narrative... pure visual action, pictures powerfully composed, dramatically photographed, smoothly and eloquently put together"

– James Shelley Hamilton

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"Nostalgic recollection of a childhood in a Welsh mining community. Film buffs have never quite forgiven John Ford's picture for beating **"CITIZEN KANE"** for the Best Film Oscar for 1941. It is very conventional, a shade prettified, and the Welsh accents are sometimes wildly offbeam. It also contains more than a slight element of Hollywood schmaltz. But it's handsomely produced and movingly acted. Like Ford's masterpiece, **"THE GRAPES OF WRATH"**, this is a song of praise to the common man; and it remains impossible to watch without shedding a tear. Oscars went to Arthur Miller (photography), Richard Day, Nathan Juran and Thomas Little (art direction). Nominated were Alfred Newman (music), E.H. Hansen (sound) and editor James B Clark. **8/10** "



Above: shooting on location in Wales would not have been a realistic option during the height of the U-boat campaign to strangle Britain into submission, and the exterior designs are certainly impressive, if just a wee bit too picaresque and clean.

Below: Crisp, McDowall and O'Brien posed rather awkwardly for a studio publicity shot, as though witnessing the second coming.

Source: Roddy McDowall memorial website



ANTI:

“Deserves the Guggenheim medal for the phoniest film of the year.”

– William Whitebait, **New Statesman**

MIXED:

“Something of the salt and wildness of the people about whom Richard Llewellyn wrote is gone. The rooms in which they live are too spacious and smooth; the line of slatey grey houses by the pit-head is too cosy; the emotions of the characters themselves have been tamed... But the John Ford quality is not absent; the sympathy with men and women living simply and passionately, the essential faith in simple human beings. And, as always, he has communicated his feeling to his cast.”

– Dilys Powell

PRO:

“The same sort of solid enjoyment, enrichment and communication between authors and audience that comes from reading a good book... The film is conceived and executed with dignity, honesty, thoroughness and superlative competence. It is a full-bodied work. It has stature and completeness; a maximum of cinematic skill, the minimum of movie trickery.”

– Cecilia Ager, **PM**

“Looked at coldly – as coldly as one can with a picture so warm with humanness and its laughter and tears – the superlative thing about [it] is its technical style, the perfection of cinematic narrative that it achieves.”

– James Shelley Hamilton, **NBR**

“A motion picture of great poetic charm and dignity, a picture rich in visual fabrication and in the vigour of its imagery and one which may truly be regarded as an outstanding film of the year.”

– Bosley Crowther

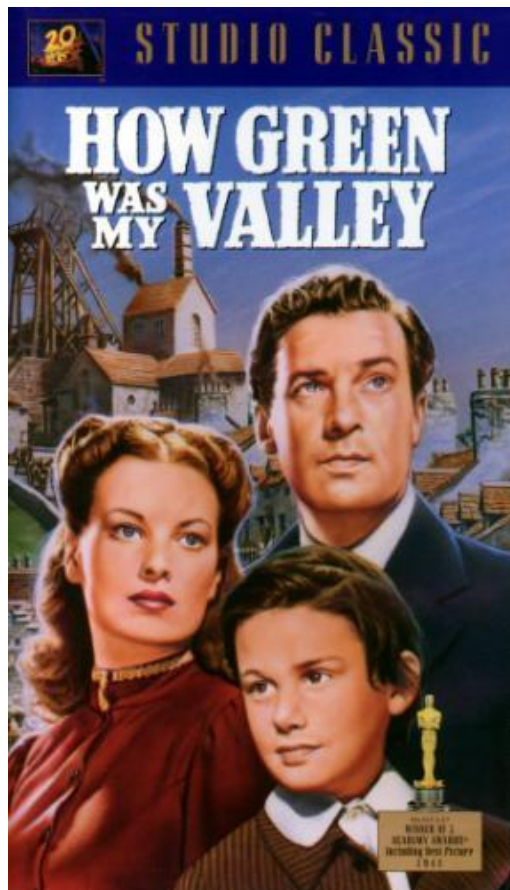
“One of the most meritorious motion pictures to hit the screen... John Ford has endowed the treatment with idyllic grandeur. His work has a deep, poetic cadence and, for the first time in his long and representative career, the director has capture the basic nature of all true art, the poignancy of humanity. With infinite pity he reveals the aspirations, the struggles, the small triumphs and harrowing defeats of Little People, and his personal concern with the fates of his characters breeds a lyricism that is all too rare in an era of the machine-made photoplay.”

– Herb Sterne



Two scenes deleted from the final release print. Top: Proud Gwyllem Morgan has Huw measured up for his first suit, presumably when Huw graduates with flying colours from school. Bottom: After his drubbing on the first day at school, Huw receives a crash course in fighting from village boxer Dai Bando, who later offers some helpful tips to Huw's viperous schoolmaster. The unavoidable Barry Fitzgerald chips in as Dai Bando's coach and second.

Source: indeterminate website



If there is a computer-colourised version of this film in circulation, may it be ritually disembowelled by the samurai of good taste.

Source: indeterminate website

The Films of 20th Century Fox review:

“**“HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY”** won an Oscar as the best film of 1941, as well as Oscars for director John Ford, photographer Arthur Miller, and actor Donald Crisp. Set in Wales around the turn of the century, it tells of a family headed by a stern father (Crisp) and a gentle mother (Sara Allgood), whose five eldest sons are all coal miners and whose youngest (Roddy McDowall) is a sensitive lad they hope will find his way into a better life. Fox built a Welsh village on location and created a warm sense of atmosphere to convey the sentiments of the central character (the boy played by Roddy McDowall but grown to manhood) looking back on a past way of life and the many people he remembered, including a minister (Walter Pidgeon) and his thwarted love for sister Angharad (Maureen O’Hara). Welsh critics found the film overly sentimental in its treatment of a sad period in their history – the squalor of coal mining prior to trade unionism – but generally the film

remains a firm favourite and a testament to the story-telling ability of John Ford.”

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

“Zanuck constructed a Welsh mining village on the back lot for this film of Richard Llewellyn’s very popular novel but the varying accents and incidents irrevocably date it, despite some felicities in the handling. Roddy McDowall is the young hero, the “I” of the novel, and his family consists of Donald Crisp (father), Sara Allgood (mother), Maureen O’Hara, Patric Knowles, John Loder and a heap of brothers. Walter Pidgeon is the new priest, vowing not to marry Maureen so that she won’t live in poverty, while other villagers coping with creeping socialism [sic] and trouble at the mine include Arthur Shields, Barry Fitzgerald, Anna Lee, and a lone genuine Welshman, Rhys Williams¹. ** ”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

“This poignant saga of a coal-mining family in Wales examines the grim, dangerous life down in the mines and the labour dispute that divides a tight-knit family presided over by a loving, but iron-willed patriarch. Above all else, however, it is a tribute to the Welsh family unit. This heart-tugging domestic drama is a triumph of Hollywood craftsmanship, and it swept the Academy Awards, winning 5 Oscars including Best Picture, Best Cinematography and Best Director. **** ”

Radio Times Guide to Films review:

“This magnificent Oscar-winning family saga may seem a trifle dated, with its superb, but phoney, studio re-creations of the valleys of South Wales. But there’s no denying its power to move as well as entertain audiences, as director John Ford lovingly details life in the pits and valleys of Richard Llewellyn’s famous autobiographical novel. Ford rightly won the Best Director Oscar², and the movie won Best Picture, but often overlooked is the sincerity of the film’s hand-picked cast, notably sturdy Walter Pidgeon and fiery Ford regular

¹ Roddy McDowall, very obviously, was of Welsh birth, and socialism was not something that needed to be “coped with” in Wales. It was embraced there wholeheartedly, as elsewhere.

² Rightly? Over Orson Welles for “CITIZEN KANE”, and John Huston for “THE MALTESE FALCON”?

Maureen O'Hara. The Best Supporting Actor Oscar went to Donald Crisp's patriarch. This

is precisely the kind of movie that gave



A ravening fiend, Huw makes a lunge for the toffee his pocket money would purchase from the corner shop, where even in the late 19th century staff were required to wear traditional outfits to charm the passing tourist...



Cliché cliché – Huw's first day at school, and of course the camera finds him smitten with the first frock-wearing classmate to cross his line of vision. Most boys of that day (like all the ones behind him) would have paid a girl no more mind than a twelve-volume treatise on algebra, but Huw is the hero is it? This scene also is not present in existing prints of the film.

Source: Roddy McDowall memorial website

Hollywood film-making supremacy in its heyday³. ***** ”

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

“Touching and heartwarming drama of life in a Welsh coal-mining town. Memorable and moving moments abound. Much effort was lavished on exquisite production detail, giving eloquent class to the film, which is based on Richard Llewellyn’s novel. Academy Awards: best picture; Ford, best director; Crisp, best supporting actor; Arthur Miller, cinematography. Nominations: Allgood, best supporting actress; Philip Dunne, screenplay. **** ”

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

“Winning 1941 Oscars as Best Picture, Best Support (Donald Crisp), Best Direction (John Ford), Best Photography (Arthur Miller) was a bit excessive in the year that also produced "CITIZEN KANE" and "THE MALTESE FALCON", but the Welsh mining village story can still warm hearts and catch throats. 33”

Excerpt from **Those Endearing Young Charms** entry on Roddy McDowall:

“Roddy acted out the part of a young Welsh boy named Huw, who narrates the story of his childhood in a simple mining village where the life was poor but rich in family relationships. Taken from the Richard Llewellyn best seller.”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“The backlot mining village (impressive as it is) and the babel of accents hardly aid suspension of disbelief in this nostalgic recollection of a Welsh childhood, based on Richard Llewellyn’s novel. An elegant and eloquent film, nevertheless, even if the characteristically laconic Fordian poetry seems more contrived here (not least in the uncharacteristic use of an off-screen narration). Its tale of the calamitous break-up of a traditional way of life – with immigration to America offering a despairing hope of

salvation – looms larger in the mind if you think of it (as Ford obviously did) of dealing with Ireland rather than Wales.”



Contemporary poster art

Source: indeterminate website

³ No, what gave Hollywood film-making supremacy in its heyday was a thing called "dollars"...





In the depths of a winter strike, when the mood of the miners turns ugly towards Huw's father, who had opposed industrial action from the outset, Huw and his mother attend an outdoor meeting where she rails against those who had turned on her husband. Returning home, she and Huw fall into the icy river and both are bed-bound for months. Huw overhears the doctor saying he may never walk again, but minister Gruffydd raises his hopes and beguiles his time with boys' classic stories, principally "Treasure Island" (which, it so happens, was written for and told to another bedridden boy by R.L.Stevenson.)



Right: British children today will scarcely credit that, less than a century ago, boys were still put to hard labour down the mines at 14 and 15. The short cropped hair and ugly outside clothing may be back in fashion, but today's adolescents are pampered beyond belief by comparison.

Below: Maureen O'Hara gives McDowall a sly poke in the ribs, and a warning against scene-stealing.



TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Award-winning John Ford tearjerker about life in a Welsh mining village at the turn of the 19th century. Beautiful performances by Donald Crisp, Sara Allgood, Roddy McDowall and Barry Fitzgerald produce the maximum impact, especially in the climactic scenes. The Welsh village set, designed by Nathan Juran and Richard Day, is one of the best ever constructed in Hollywood, and turned up in several other films in subsequent years. Juran and Day deservedly took one of the production's many Oscars, which also included awards for Best Film (against strong competition) and Best Director. **** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Based on a best-selling novel, this saga of Welsh coal-mining life is replete with much human interest, romance, conflict and almost every other human emotion. It's a warm,

human story that Richard Llewellyn wrought basically, and the skilful John Ford camera-painting, from a fine scenario by Philip Dunne, needed only expert casting to round out the job.

Donald Crisp and Sara Allgood, as Pa and Ma Morgan, the heads of the Welsh mining family, are an inspired casting. Walter Pidgeon is excellent as the minister; Maureen O'Hara splendid as the object of his unrequited love, who marries the mine-owner's son out of pique.

And, above all, there is Roddy McDowall. He's winsome, manly, histrionically proficient in an upright, two-fisted manner.

The transition from book to screen also utilises the first person singular narrative form, with graphic delineations of how green, indeed, was young Huw (pronounced Hugh) Morgan's valley as he recounts his life from childhood, unfolding the fullness of the Morgans' honest,

God-fearing, industrial life span in the Welsh valley.

Academy Awards 1941: Best Picture, Director, Supporting Actor (Donald Crisp), Black & White Cinematography, Black & White Interior Decoration (Richard Day and Nathan Juran).”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“This 1941 Best Picture Oscar-winner is a tribute to the lasting value of a family’s love. Director John Ford also won an Oscar for the way he brings out the soul of Richard Llewellyn’s bestseller, which concerns a mining family, as seen through the eyes of its youngest member (Roddy McDowall, in one of his most famous child-star roles). ***** ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“Emotionally majestic and spiritually moving, this is one of John Ford’s undisputed masterpieces, a film that neither fades nor fails after repeated viewings. The mining area in South Wales and its hard-working miners and their families are seen through the eyes of Huw (Roddy McDowall), the youngest of six children in a family headed by a stern father (Donald Crisp) and loving mother (Sara Allgood)⁴. Set at the turn of the century and told in flashback, the film shows an unspoiled valley, full of love and warmth, wherein the trials and hardships of the community are told through a series of moving vignettes.

Everything about the film is touching; master director John Ford builds one simple scene upon another with very little plot, using incidents in the life of one family to tell the general tale, demonstrating changes and recording milestones. Beautifully assisted by cameraman Arthur Miller, Ford received strong support from studio chief Darryl Zanuck, who personally produced the film. The superlative cast is a Who’s Who of Hollywood’s Irish community, with a noble assist from Welsh singers. ***** ”

⁴ This is the second source to describe Huw’s parents in such clichéd terms, when the whole point of the characterisations is that Huw’s father is a gentle and loving man – if one hide-bound by tradition – and Huw’s mother a formidable woman fully able to take the whole village by the ear when the need arises. “Stern father and loving mother”? What hackneyed stereotypes they would be !

Source unknown:

“For drama fans, John Ford’s multi-Oscar winner **"HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY"** (running time 118 minutes) tells the haunting tale of the passing of a Welsh mining community...”

Cast:

Huw Morgan	Roddy McDowall
Mr Gruffydd	Walter Pidgeon
Gwyllem Morgan	Donald Crisp
Mrs Morgan	Sara Allgood
Angharad Morgan	Maureen O’Hara
Bronwyn	Anna Lee
Ianto Morgan	John Loder
Ivor Morgan	Patric Knowles
Mr Jonas	Morton Lowry
Cyfurtha	Barry Fitzgerald
Narrator	Irving Pichel



In yet another scene absent from any print of the film I've encountered, Huw appears to be assisting Gruffydd in the chapel workshop, emphasising the strong bond that has grown between them since Huw's recovery. It's not known whether a restored version is available containing some of this deleted footage.

John Ford's native appetite for Oirish whimsy-wamsy ("**THE QUIET MAN**") is transplanted here mystically intact to the Welsh valleys of Hollywood, and the cavernous rooms of two-up, two-down mining cottages where rugged hard-working folk burst into melodious harmony when in their cups, which is frequently. He kept John Wayne out of it, mercifully, but the core ingredients of Ford mythology are otherwise present, and if the film's American origins are not given away by slips like the misspelling of "labor" on mine-gate notices, they resonate loud and clear in the family dispute over unionisation of the workforce. Ford, one suspects, sides with quiet-spoken patriarch Donald Crisp (a marvelously warm performance) in his implacable opposition to trade unionism, although the logic of the storyline is that Crisp was in the wrong, and his sons in the right, on that score.

The Morgan family are an archetype much beloved of American cinema and television. The wise, kindly, strong father, the wise, indefatigable loving matron, the proud beautiful daughter, the heart-of-oak sons, and the adoring youngest child, much beloved but gently kept in his place. It is an archetype we recognise immediately from "**Bonanza**", "**Little House on the Prairie**", "**LIFE WITH FATHER**" and a score of other titles celebrating that bedrock of all social good, the pre-nuclear church-going family.

The film's posture on religion is an interesting, faintly ambivalent one. The Rhonnda mining community are simple, godfearing folk to a man, and there is much speechifying by Walter Pidgeon about the healthy pragmatism of the gospels, yet the chapel itself is depicted as a focus of spite, hypocrisy, malicious gossip and social division, to the extent that in the penultimate scene we see Pidgeon excoriate his flock and relinquish his post. Quite how this tallies with Ford's pioneer values is a moot point.

Though the story is told largely through his perspective, Roddy McDowall's Huw is a secondary character in the film, and the director clearly had little feeling for children. Nevertheless, "**HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY**" is a seminal childhood picture, in the same sense as "**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**" or "**THE REIVERS**". The child is not the hero of his own tale, or her own tale, but sentiment and nostalgia for childhood fill every frame. The film's tag-line (see first page) is a preposterous bid from the studio's publicity department to sell it as something quite different, emphasising a sexual affair that never in fact happens.

One would have liked to see Huw's relationship with his father developed better, but more emphasis is placed on his deep admiration for Pidgeon's young, sympathetic minister, who introduces him to the classics during his bedridden winter. The source book may be autobiographical, but some episodes in the story – particularly Huw's first days at school – conform to all the clichés of period childhood drama. Huw is rounded upon by a sneering, venomous schoolmaster the moment he steps through the classroom door, is being pounded by the class bully (with an accent straight out of Eton) in the next scene, one sympathetic girl in the class duly taking his part, and a few scenes later is being soundly thrashed by the schoolmaster for fighting, which of course dissipates on the spot all enmity from the bully he's just trounced. These scenes are entirely interchangeable with "Tom Brown's Schooldays" or "Tom Sawyer", and do not have the ring of truth. They too, are an archetype.

What this film does not do, although one or two critics seem to think it did, is offer any insights at all to the squalid and treacherous working conditions of miners in the early part of the century. Until the final scene, which takes away Huw's beloved dada, we have only one very brief glimpse below ground, and that is when Huw is brawling with another boy who's insulted his sister – so a playground fight transplanted to the mine. Ford has a reputation as a man's man director, but his film concentrates more on domestic trials and tribulations, and an industrial dispute, than it does on the masculine world of the pits, where men's lungs were destroyed and backs broken, while the mine-owners comported themselves like landed gentry.



The ending, indeed, is the weakest point in the whole film. From the emotional impact of Crisp's death in the mine, Ford cuts instantaneously to a seraphic close-up of the widow waiting at the pit-head, who declares her husband has just come to her and told her of the "glories" he has seen. That is pure Hollywood. As phoney as phoney could be, and it detracts almost completely from the emotional impact of the preceding scene. Zanuck doubtless wanted to end his picture on an upbeat note – the public don't like sad endings – but it could certainly have been more subtly done than that!

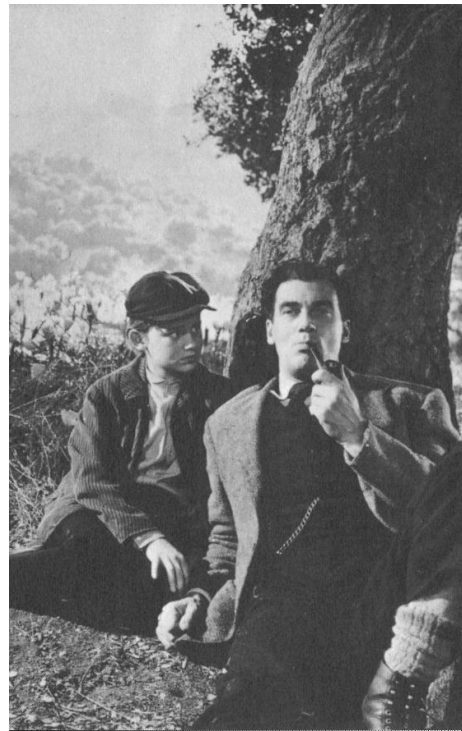
The film's memorable scenes are undiminished by its flaws however – Huw craving his father's notice at table after all his brothers have stormed out of the house; a summons from the palace arriving for one of Huw's dumbstruck older brothers; the mineowner arriving unannounced to seek permission from Huw's father for his son to call on Angharad; the impromptu boxing lesson from Dai Bando; mother Morgan's contempt for the "practical arithmetic" problems Huw is set in preparation for his scholarship exams. Above all, the film is warmed enormously by the joint portrayals of Sara Allgood and Donald Crisp as the parents.

McDowall, for his part, is sweet and endearing as the wide-eyed Huw. His faint Welsh burr was never more at home than in this role, and his acting limitations – the second schoolyard scrap reminds one with a shudder of his later "**THE ADVENTURES OF BULLWHIP GRIFFIN**" (67) – are not yet insuperable. If anything, he was an almost painfully polite and diffident British boy, a Freddie Batholomew without the haughty, pampered air, and that is just so refreshing nowadays that one watches him with newfound admiration. Slightly built and fretful-browed, his victory over a bully head and shoulders taller is as silly as it is out of character, but in the main he fills the role of devoted youngest son without seeming insipid. It was a performance he would more or less repeat in "**MY FRIEND FLICKA**", "**THE PIED PIPER**" and others. He was a one-note boy actor, if truth be said, but for a space in early puberty that was a pleasant, musical note on the ear. It only began to grate when he reached manhood.

Brace yourself for a deal of male Welsh choirsong, and the plot concessions necessary to a 1940s Hollywood "women's picture", and enjoy the felicities of good dialogue writing, strong characterisations, and quality camerawork. If this were remade today it would be harsher, grimmer, more honest in certain respects (more dishonest in others), but it would not very likely be so memorable and warm. **Recommended.**

See subject index under [AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TITLES](#), [BULLYING](#), [HISTORY](#), [HOSPITALS / SICK CHILDREN](#), [MARTIAL ARTS / BOXING](#), [OSCAR WINNERS / AWARD WINNERS](#), [RECOMMENDED TITLES](#), [SCHOOL](#), [SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS](#) and [WORKING BOYS AND GIRLS](#).

[The Archive presently holds 30 stills from this title – too many to imbed in a single document. For those not included here, see the images section]



*So read the hand signals –
Top left, from sister
Angharad to little brother*

*Top right, from Huw to the
educated man he has
grown to admire*

*Right, from the departing
minister to an anguished
boy whose father lies
trapped somewhere in the
waterlogged mine*





A scene from the 20th Century-Fox production///
"HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY"
