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NOTABLE FIRSTS

Among the titles included in the archive are several cinematic milestones – some large, some small, some eccentric. For film historians then, and trivia fans, a short catalogue of those events:

The first story film ever made was "L'ARROSEUR ARROSÉ" (1895), in which a scamp plays a trick on a gardener hosing the lawn. It was shot at the Lumiere factory with a gardener and a boy employee, and must have lasted all of thirty seconds. Previous demonstrations of the moving picture had been documentary fragments of life – a train pulling into a station, workers leaving the factory gates – but this was, to the best of my information, the first scripted film, the first comedy with a punch-line (the boy gets a spanking) and the first named child performer in cinema (le petit Duval).

The first use of double exposure and stop motion effects (in British cinema) was in "CINDERELLA AND THE FAIRY GODMOTHER" (1898).

The first (British) synchronised-sound films were Gibbons' "Phono-bio-Tableaux" films of 1900 – snippets of popular songs performed and recorded on gramophone, among them "THE BLIND BOY".

The screen's first Oliver Twist (1909) was a woman, Edith Storey. The first film version to cast a boy (Tibor Lubinszky) in the title role was the sixth, Hungary's "TWIST OLIVER" in 1919. The eighth adaptation starred Jackie Coogan, in 1922.

The first British four-reel feature (61 minutes) was Hepworth's 1912 "OLIVER TWIST", starring Ivy Millais as Oliver and Willie West as Dodger.

The first British nine-reel feature (125 minutes) was the 1913 "DAVID COPPERFIELD", featuring Eric Desmond as the boy David. It had already been filmed two years previously.

The screen's first Jim Hawkins was a woman...

The first (and possibly only) film on the Evils of juvenile masturbation was the 1920 silent "THE SOLITARY SIN", in which one boy is rescued from snake-strangling by a vigilant father, another one contracts a venereal disease (!) and is forbidden to marry, and a third goes insane. So just keep your hands off, boys!

The first true international child star was Jackie Coogan, who in the 1920s was even granted an audience with the pope when his parents took him on a triumphal tour of Europe, a courtesy generally only accorded to visiting heads of state. At the time he was one of the top five box office grossing stars in the US.

The first fictional tale to feature a child hero is said to be "EL LAZARILLO DE TORMES" ("The Little Guide of Tormes") published in Spain 1554 by an anonymous author, and first filmed in 1925 starring Alfredo "Pitusin" Hurtado.

The screen's first Peter Pan – the archetypal boy – was a woman (and so have all the rest been, with the single exception of Spielberg's abysmal "HOOK", where it was a man).

The world's first (partial) talking picture, "THE JAZZ SINGER" (1927) featured Bobby Gordon and Leon Holmes in the early (silent) scenes.

The world's first milk carton was promoted in publicity shots by the cast of OUR GANG.



The first child to win an Oscar was Shirley Temple in 1934, aged 6, "in grateful recognition of her outstanding contribution to screen entertainment".



The first televised face in history was that of an office boy.....



The first foreign language film to win an Oscar was "SCIUSCIA" ("Shoeshine", Italy 1946), a neo-realist portrait of two boys drawn into black marketeering and destroyed when they're sent to a "reform school". †



The first purpose-shot British matinee serial was "DUSTY BATES" (c1947) for the Rank organisation's Children's Entertainment Films division. It concerned a boy stowaway catching a gang of jewel thieves.



The first use of the "independent frame" technique (an enhancement of back projection) developed by David Rawnsley of the Rank Research Department, was in "THE FROZEN FALLS" (c1947), a children's film about a secret formula hidden down a mine.



The first use of the word "arse" on screen was by Richard Attenborough in "THE GUINEA PIG" (1948), where he plays a working class boy sent on a scholarship to a public school. It had substantial shock value in its day.



Walt Disney's first live-action feature was "TREASURE ISLAND" (1950) introducing Bobby Driscoll as Jim Hawkins. Both Disney and Driscoll's parents were heavily fined for employing a child below the then-rigorously enforced UK minimum performance age.



The first television series filmed in colour was "The Cisco Kid" (1951-55)



The first British "X certificate" film was "THE YELLOW BALLOON" (1952), a minor thriller about a boy hounded by a petty blackmailer, starring Andrew Ray, age 12.



Morocco's first feature film was "WECHMA" (1970), about an orphan boy adopted by an Islamic fundamentalist whose notions of discipline verged on baroque sadism.



The largest set in film history – a dirigible hangar – was used for the final scenes of "CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND" (1977).



The greatest box office success since records began (in its time), "E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL" (1982) starred 10-year old Henry Thomas and a predominantly child cast.



The most successful comedy film ever made (unaccountably) was "HOME ALONE" (1990), starring 8-year old Macaulay Culkin as a choirboy/Rambo remix who whales the tar out of two comic-book burglars.



The first feature film to cost in excess of \$100,000,000, "TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY" (1991), essentially concerned two cyborgs from the future battling over the fate of 10-year old Edward Furlong, streetkid and saviour of mankind.



Also briefly to top the poll as the all-time no.1 box office hit, "JURASSIC PARK" (1993) featured Joseph Mazzello and Ariana Richards as hot snacks on the hoof in a world of computer-generated dinosaurs.



Bosnia-Herzegovina's first feature film following the 1992 war in former Yugoslavia was "LE CERCLE PARFAIT" (1996), about two refugee orphan boys taken in by a poet during the siege of Sarajevo.

† In addition, many films concerning children have won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language film, and the Palmes d'Or at Cannes. Among these were "PELLE EROBREREN", "MITT LIV SOM HUND", "FANNY OCH ALEXANDER", "NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO" and "KOLYA".