

This Blessed Plot

A film by Marc Isaacs

Screenplay by Adam Ganz



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Certificate 15 / Running time: 78 minutes



LOGLINE

A playful performance of Documentary and Fiction in a small Essex town where the dead surround the living.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When a young Chinese filmmaker arrives in, Thaxted, a small Essex village, she discovers the dead surround the living and the border between them is easily crossed. Played by a cast of non-professional actors, This Blessed Plot is a playful tale of love loss and betrayal.

LONG SYNOPSIS

When Lori, a young Chinese filmmaker, arrives in the small English village of Thaxted, she discovers it's a place where the dead surround the living and the border between the two is easily crossed. Lori is introduced to the village church and she becomes fascinated with long dead Socialist Vicar, Conrad Noel, who speaks to her from beyond the grave. And he's not the only one. Filmmaking and archive breaks down the borders between the past and present in a tale of love, loss and betrayal. Following on from his last hybrid feature, *The Filmmaker's House* (2020), Marc Isaacs again embraces the artistic freedom that working with a micro-budget and a cast of unknown non-professionals provide. *This Blessed Plot* is his attempt to innovate by remaining outside conventional industrial film production structures. He works with people from some of his past documentary films and new characters he has encountered in Thaxted.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

This Blessed Plot is set in the Essex village of Thaxted where fiction and truth are wound tightly together like tree roots, so it's impossible to tell where one starts and the other ends.

I deploy Brechtian techniques of Alienation and play with the idea of suspended disbelief. The story centres around Lori, a female Chinese filmmaker, visiting Thaxted to look for the subject of her next film. She encounters characters both dead and alive, each offering an insight into England's past and present state. From the ghost of the early 20th century radical Christian socialist vicar Conrad Noel to Keith, a man haunted by betrayal and the sudden return into his life of his petty criminal friend known as "Uncle"; and Maggie, the church-going wife of a deceased Morris dancer.

I Deploy a cast of non professional actors, to tell a tale of love, loss and betrayal. I worked with a screenplay by Adam Ganz, with whom I co-wrote my previous feature The Filmmaker's House. The script draws on all kinds of elements which can be found in the picturesque Essex village of Thaxted where extraordinary stories from past and present co-exist. Here myths of England and Englishness play out in folk memory of the Peasants Revolt, William Blake and William Morris. But their dream of a time when things were good in England is also summoned by a darker and angrier force increasingly present in these last years.

This Blessed Plot, looks at the power of fiction in the world. I explore ideas of performance of the self and how people find an articulation of expression through objects and self curation. The documentary form is always a shapeshifter, but still with the power to stop you in your tracks. In this film, the documentary is linked to the music of Gustav Holst (who lived in the town) and the slow and macabre folk dance of The Abbots Bromley, brought to Thaxted in Noel's time from its home in the Midlands.

Is it truth or fiction? This Blessed Plot takes you to the myth and make-believe world, where docufiction was born and where it belongs. It recognises that modernity expressed its anxieties through tales from before it was born.

Thaxted is an idealised village which was chosen by the Boulting Brothers to make their 1939 documentary Ripe Earth (which features heavily in the film) when they decided to make a film romanticising rural England. There was a reason they chose Thaxted; because their friend Conrad Noel was the vicar. Noel was known as the "Red Vicar"; who hoisted the Sinn Fein flag inside the church after the Easter Rising and the red flag a year later following the Russian Revolution. Now, Noel's socialism seems to have become the hardest myth to believe.

Following on from my last hybrid feature, The Filmmaker's House (2020), I again embrace the artistic freedom that working with a micro-budget and a cast of unknown non-professionals provide. This Blessed Plot is my attempt to innovate by remaining outside conventional industrial film production structures. I work with people from some of my past documentary films and new characters encountered in Thaxted.

Marc Isaacs

FILMMAKER

Marc Isaacs - Writer, Director, Producer

Marc Isaacs is viewed as one of the top filmmaker's in Britain to have dedicated so much time to the observation of British lives over an extended period. His work has been written about in numerous books on the documentary form such as Paul Ward's, *The Margins of Reality* and *This Much Is True* by James Quinn. Marc has won BAFTA'S, Grieson Awards and numerous prizes at international film festivals. His filmography includes the multiple award winning *Lift* (2001); *Calais the last Border* (2003); *All White In Barking* (2008); *Men of the City* (2010); *The Road: A Story of Life and Death* (2013) and *The Filmmaker's House* (2020). Isaacs' films look into how people dwell in contemporary, late-capitalist, postcolonial Europe through the notion of a spaced based cinema, whose real and metaphoric values, it simultaneously represents, foregrounds and contests. His work pushes the creative possibilities of the documentary form. Isaacs has had retrospectives in France, Israel and the UK and in 2018 Second Run DVD released a complete box set of his work. Isaacs is an Associate Professor in Ethnographic and Documentary Film at UCL.

Complete Works:

The Filmmaker's House (2020)

Out of Time Exhibition (Open City Film Festival, September 2017)

Men Who Sleep In Trucks/When Night Falls (BBC 3, July 2016)

Outsiders (Vice, December 2014)

The Road: A Story of Life and Death (2012)

Outside the Court (BBC 4, April 2011)

The Old Man and His Bed (On-Line April 2011)

Men of the City (BBC4, October 2009)

Cutting Barking (DVD December, 2008)

All White In Barking (BBC2, March 2008)

The Curious World of Frinton-on-Sea (BBC2, March 2008)

Philip and His Seven Wives (BBC4, April 2006)

Someday My Prince Will Come (Arte, France, July 2005)

Calais: The Last Border (BBC2, February 2004)

Travellers (Channel 4, October 2002)

Lift (Channel 4, July 2001)

Lifters (BBC2, September 2001)

DIRECTED by

Marc Isaacs

WRITTEN by

Adam Ganz

With

Yingge Lori Yang

Keith Martin

Susan Mallendine

Margaret Catteril

Paul Bettie

Norman Culliss

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Marc Isaacs

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