

1947

Our first meeting had been a year ago, again in Oxford. At that time Lindsay had been one of the hosts for a meeting of the national committee of the film society movement. I had no right to belong to this august body; I was merely a fellow traveller accompanying the official member, Margaret Hancock, my friend from the Civic Playhouse in Bradford. Soon, bored with the proceedings, I skived off with Lindsay. We had discovered a mutual interest in American movies, and spent much time together talking endlessly about films and secretly going to see whatever happened to be showing at the cinema.

1948

I was delighted when, very soon after his return to The Works, my husband Desmond once again took me into his confidence concerning the shifting situation he now was facing each day at Horbury.

One evening, soon after the New Year, my optimism was confirmed. He asked me to give him my opinion on a script for a film about 'The Works' which he had commissioned from a film company in London.

Relying on what I had seen of documentary films, I read it with great interest. There was much to criticise. To me it seemed pedestrian and boring; once seen it would be easily forgotten. After listening to my objections, Des read it again and decided my criticisms were valid. Coming from nowhere I heard myself saying, 'Why not make the film ourselves?'

I had only just taken in this daunting prospect when Des asked me the thousand dollar question: who was to make the film? Suddenly I found myself saying, 'I know exactly the person who could make it: Lindsay Anderson.' With quite unfounded faith in my intuition, Desmond agreed.

It was 17th January and the whole of Britain was covered in a deep layer of snow. In fact, it was snowing as I walked out of the station to the Post Office to find Lindsay's address. After some delay, it transpired he was living at his mother's house, which carried the strange name 'Cringaletty'. I was warned this was quite a long way up the London road.

The door was opened with some caution by an imposing, rather grand female whom I rightly presumed was Lindsay's mother. As we confronted each other, both of us were equally taken aback: she by my dripping, weird clothes and dishevelled appearance, and I by the stern, forbidding look on her face. Ignoring her negative reception, I asked to see Lindsay (and could tell from her disparaging glance that she feared the worst).

With evident reluctance, she opened the door and ushered me in to a large hall; and there I stood, gently dripping while she called up the stairs, her voice full of harsh resentment, giving Lindsay the – to her - unwelcome news that there was a woman asking to see him. When he saw me he stopped short, exclaiming, 'Lois, what on earth are you doing here?' He was even more astonished at my reply. Looking up to him from the hall – I was never asked into any other room – I explained, eagerly, the exact purpose of my visit: 'I've come to ask you to make a film.'

For the first and probably for the only time in his life, Lindsay was non-plussed. He came slowly down the wide stairs and, facing me, said, 'I can't do that; I'm just about to leave for Oxford to take a teacher training course.' And to prove the truth in his statement, he pointed to his roped up trunk on the floor beside him. I made the prophetic reply:

'You don't want to be a teacher, you want to make films.'

Which is exactly what he did. He agreed to meet Desmond and me the next day, in Oxford – just as I had wanted him to do. Feeling justifiably elated, I walked back down London Road to make my wet way to the station. At the end of that long day I had a definite sense of achievement. Triumphant I told Des of the result of my journey into the unknown. We now had a film director.

Lois Smith

Wally Woodcock

The film *Meet the Pioneers* - Lindsay Anderson's first - can be found at: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-meet-the-pioneers-1948-online>

Charles Drazin's piece about Lois and Lindsay Anderson, from the Journal of British Cinema and Television can be found at: <https://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/jbctv.2014.0223?widget=journaleditorialboard&journalCode=jbctv>

