

The Ghost Train (U)

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On 8th October, 13 members watched the 1941 film, The Ghost Train.

The comedy thriller/mystery film, directed by Walter Forde and starring Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch, is based on the 1923 play The Ghost Train by Arnold Ridley (of Dad's Army fame).

The film is set in Cornwall. Several passengers leave a train for a connection to Truro, only to find that they have missed it owing to Tommy Gander's antics in delaying their train en route (he pulls the emergency cord so that he can collect his hat which has blown out of the train). The passengers are stranded at the station during a rainy night, and learn that the station is supposedly haunted by a ghost train.

The characters are developed as they interact, with Askey's Gander being very annoying to the group (and us, by the way). Leaving the group in the station waiting room, the stationmaster departs to go home, but returns on the stroke of 11pm, dying in front of them, his death being confirmed by one of the passengers (a doctor on his way to Truro to act as a locum for a month). As the story develops, the stationmaster's body disappears, an apparently mad girl appears in the scene claiming to be influenced by the Ghost Train, her brother in pursuit, and a train rushes through the station on the disused line, at exactly the same time as the original ghost train.

One of the passengers then produces a gun, shooting at a "ghost" who is walking back down the track. After lots of confusion, the brother returns with a bus to take the passengers to Truro, but at this point it becomes clear that all is not as it seems. The real returning train, now loaded with weapons for a set of fifth columnists, crashes at the swing bridge (which was the site of original ghost train incident, and which has been opened by Gander), and the conspirators are rounded up (including the Doctor, the stationmaster, the mad girl and her brother).

Adapted from the original play (written with World War 1 as its focus) to be an entertaining piece of war propaganda, the film was clearly of its time: the soft focus on the leading lady, the blatant sexism ("the girl is not as dumb as she looks"), the (now defined as) toxic masculinity on display, and Askey's terrible Chinese accent in a scene referencing Charlie Chan.

The special effects were also very 1941 — models that may have been accepted then but are almost laughable now.

But, it was enjoyable to some degree. Apart from Askey, who didn't act at all and said "I thang you" far too often, the cast was competent — except for a dodgy Cornish accent by the stationmaster. So, it was a 1941 piece of entertainment/propaganda: being seen as that, it was worth watching.

Thanks to Will Heard for the loan of this movie.