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PICTURES.

Samuel Goldwyn
SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY



A film by
Francis Lee

UK • 104 min. • 2017

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***God's Own Country* Production Notes**

Logline

Francis Lee's feature film debut is a contemporary tale of self-discovery and emotional-awakening set on the sheep farming hills of rural England.

Synopsis

Johnny Saxby works long hours in brutal isolation on his family's remote farm in the north of England. He numbs the daily frustration of his lonely existence with nightly binge-drinking at the local pub and casual sex. When a handsome Romanian migrant worker arrives to take up temporary work on the family farm, Johnny suddenly finds himself having to deal with emotions he has never felt before. An intense relationship forms between the two which could change Johnny's life forever.

Long Synopsis

Spring. Yorkshire.

Johnny Saxby (24) carries the weight of his family's dilapidating sheep farm alone. His formidable grandmother Deirdre (70) is now too old to work the land, whilst his father Martin (50), once a capable farmer, struggles in the aftermath of a stroke. Socially and geographically isolated and overwhelmed by the responsibility, yet too proud to accept any help, Johnny numbs his frustration with drink, dope and casual sex.

Against Johnny's wishes, his family insist on hiring a farm labourer to help with the week of lambing. Gheorghe (27) arrives, a Romanian migrant worker keen for some real farming after a string of menial, degrading jobs. They are sent up onto the isolated moors, where they must sleep in a primitive stone shelter whilst they lamb the sheep. Gheorghe works hard, slowly winning Johnny's begrudging respect with his skill and care for the animals, as they work silently in the harsh conditions.

This growing chemistry between them results in an intense, instinctive sexual encounter. The next day they go back to work as if nothing had happened, then explore each other sexually again that night. Whereas his previous sexual encounters have been purely functional, Gheorghe is awakening something new and exciting in Johnny.

With both lads struggling to come to terms with what their time on the moor really meant and what they want from each other, Martin suffers another severe stroke and Johnny rushes to hospital to see him. With the future of the farm, his father's life and his fledgling

first relationship all hanging in the balance, Johnny feels more isolated and powerless than ever. Sent back to the farm on their own by Deirdre to tend to the animals, Johnny and Gheorghe slip into an unspoken domestic life. But soon Gheorghe's contract will come to an end...

Deirdre returns to the farm to collect some things for Martin and makes it clear that Martin will now be completely incapacitated. The pressure mounts for Johnny and he drags Gheorghe to the pub. Old habits die-hard however and after several pints, Gheorghe discovers Johnny drunkenly having sex with another man in the pub toilets. Gheorghe's trust has been broken, and he decides to leave the farm and Johnny.

Johnny returns to work, trying to overcome the pain, longing and uncertain emotions, which consume him about what he has done to Gheorghe. He realises he could work the land and keep the farm going, but he doesn't want to do it alone any more.

For the first time in his life, Johnny leaves Yorkshire to find Gheorghe in Scotland, where he's picked up work on a potato farm. Exhausted from his long journey, Johnny eventually finds Gheorghe, but will he find the words to convince him to come back?

Production Story

Writer-Director Francis Lee's background, inspirations and aspirations

"Having grown up on the remote Pennine hills in West Yorkshire I have long been obsessed with this barren landscape of my ancestry, as well as by the people who cling to it, extracting a livelihood from a few unyielding acres. Throughout my childhood what I didn't realise was the unique emotional pull land has on people who live and work on it.

"This only became apparent when I left Yorkshire to study acting in London. My experience of growing up in isolated, rural Yorkshire made me wonder what else the rest of the world had to offer me. Therefore the springboard for this project was wanting to explore what might have happened if I'd have stayed in my local community, if I had worked on the land, if I had met someone there I liked.

"At the heart of *God's Own Country* is Johnny, who has had to shut down emotionally to ensure the family farm's survival. His world is turned upside down by the arrival of Gheorghe, a Romanian migrant worker, drafted in to help with the lambing season.

"I wanted to tell a heartfelt but stark love story. I wanted to capture those feelings of both trepidation and joy that come from the possibilities of something beginning. I want to see Johnny and Gheorghe start to fall for each other, investigating how they will deal with each other's differences. I wanted to explore those moments that two people share when they

truly start to engage with one another, subtly pinpointing the struggles at the centre of their characters. Whether gay or straight, we all know what it feels like to fall in love – how difficult this can be – particularly if the circumstances are unyielding.

“I wanted to explore what this encounter might mean to someone who has not only been socially and geographically isolated but who has had to close off to any emotional life, within a traditional working class community, where you’re too physically tired at the end of a gruelling day to ‘investigate’ yourself; where family and duty come before anything else and no one cares who you’re sleeping with as long as the beasts are fed and the land tended. Given this world, would Johnny be able to access how he feels for Gheorghe? Would Gheorghe have the patience and ability to facilitate Johnny’s emotional journey? Would they be able to live and love in the harsh reality of contemporary farming life? Would Johnny finally find happiness?

“Through *God’s Own Country* I wanted to explore these themes of first love, isolation, relationships, family, duty, landscape and ultimately the sense of belonging to this very specific place.”

Working authentically with the actors...

“Given the film is set and entirely shot in the landscape where I grew up and where my family still work and live, it was critically important for me to tell this story in the most authentic way possible.

“I rehearsed extensively with the actors, not just on their characters and the emotional journey they each embark on, but also the daily physical work they encounter. Both the lead actors worked solidly on farms for weeks in preparation - dealing with all aspects of livestock and land management. Everything they had to physically do as part of the story, they learned to do from farmers in the landscape where the film is shot - the lambing, the animal medicating, the skinning of lambs, the dry stone walling, the cheese making, the fencing - everything was investigated fully until it became second nature to the actors. I wanted them to move and feel as part of the landscape their characters live and work on. Therefore everything in the film is done for real by the actors, no substitute was ever used (and this included the piss!). Alec Secareanu (Gheorghe) was personally very affected by working with the livestock, in particular birthing lambs, and it was incredible how he managed his own perceptions whilst brilliantly playing a pragmatic farm labourer.

“As a result of this work the actors developed very strong bonds with the farmer whose farm we used for the main location. This bond was very important in a number of ways and it enabled the actors to get a very personal perspective and understanding of the physical, emotional and logistic issues within this community.

“On top of the emotional and psychological transformation, the two lead actors also went through a big physical transformation. It was important to me that Johnny (Josh O’Connor) was very much the embodiment of an under resourced Yorkshire hill farmer, someone who physically works every day in the cold, rain and wind and burns every calorie he consumes. Josh dropped a considerable amount of weight to achieve this idea.

“I was also aware of the challenges of building a big emotional story. To help facilitate this I shot the film in a linear, chronological way. Allowing each scene to impact on the next emotionally, like building blocks within the story. This was particularly challenging but ultimately I believe it has paid off, given the strong, emotional arc that is depicted at the heart of the film.”

...and with the production team

“I was insistent that the ‘set’ and costumes were as authentic as possible. Anything we used on location had to be part of the farm and environment - ‘found props’ - in fact a good number of the props came from my Dad’s farm 10 minutes away. The costumes could only be bought in shops that the characters would geographically have access to, so Sian Jenkins, our costume designer, was tasked with buying the principles’ clothes from within Keighley town centre.

“The visual impact of the film came from an intensive collaboration with DP Joshua James Richards. We worked out that the camera should ‘sit’ with the characters, not allowing them to hide from our gaze. The camera movement should reflect not just the landscape but also the emotional state of the characters - we developed an intense, unrelenting style which I believe fits this story perfectly. Through lighting, we wanted to depict the ‘change’ Gheorghe brings with him into this world - how he ‘alters’ the environment, bringing his own sense of ‘light’ into this dark, unemotional world.

“From the very initial stages of this film, I knew sound was critical for me. I knew I wanted to work with the sound and picture at the same time during the editing process. For me, sound is utterly as, if not sometimes more important than picture. I built a soundscape of the natural sounds - winds were carefully orchestrated, specific bird song strategically placed, sheep noises individually selected, fire sounds were to be reflective - everything was done sonically to underpin this stark and brutal world. I worked with the idea of texturing and building the atmosphere - almost like using the wind sounds as a chorus - to contrast with the deep, emotional story set in this unrelenting location.

“Making this film in an unforgiving landscape with the constant battle of unpredictable weather (snow, rain, bright sun all in a day), animals and a huge emotional thrust was a challenge, but I hope that my ingrained experience of this world as well as my insistence on precision has produced a unique, heartfelt and authentic film.”

Principal Cast

Josh O'Connor, Johnny Saxby

Josh is a British actor, originally from Cheltenham, England. He trained as an actor at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

Josh made his feature debut in 2014 playing the role of Ed in Lone Scherfig's film, *The Riot Club*. Since then he has enjoyed working with Stephen Frears on two occasions, both in *The Program* and *Florence Foster Jenkins*. He starred in Edinburgh Film Festival winner *Hide and Seek* and also opposite Hannah Murray in Jeppe Ronde's 2015 Festival favourite *Bridge End*. He is best known in the UK from his performances as James in *Peaky Blinders* with Cillian Murphy and currently, the literary hero Lawrence Durrell in BBC's hugely successful *The Durrells*. He was recently named a 2016 Screen International Star of Tomorrow.

Alec Secareanu, Gheorghe Ionescu

A graduate of the Romanian University for Theatre and Film, Alexandru ("Alec") Secareanu made his first appearance in a series of shorts in 2007. While he continued to also play in independent theatre, he debuted in 2008 in a successful TV series and in 2011 in his first movie. *God's Own Country* marks Alec's first appearance in an English language production.

Ian Hart, Martin Saxby

Ian Hart is an English stage, television and film actor who studied video production at South Mersey College in Liverpool before playing the lead in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*. He then appeared in Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* and Stephen Frears' *Liam*. His best-known role is that of Professor Quirrell in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Hart has also played John Lennon three times including in *Backbeat*, and he played Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the film *Finding Neverland*. More recently he's appeared in the television series *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Last Kingdom* and *Bates Motel*. His awards include the Venice Film Festival Award for the Best Supporting Actor and the London Evening Standard Film Award for Most Promising Newcomer, both for *No Surrender* and the Tribeca Film Festival Award for Best Actor for *Blind Flight*.

Gemma Jones, Deirdre Saxby

Gemma Jones is an English actress on both stage and screen. Her film appearances include Academy Award winner *Sense and Sensibility*, and all three Bridget Jones's Films, Woody

Allen's *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*, Poppy Pomfrey in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and *Harry Potter & the Half Blood Prince*. Most recently she starred in *Radiator* and yet to be released *Fish Without Bicycles*.

Gemma's television credits include the BBC Film *Marvellous* for which she won the 2015 BAFTA TV award for Best Supporting Actress, *Capital*, *Unforgotten* and *Last Tango In Halifax*. She starred in two series of *Spooks* also for the BBC. Her numerous theatre credits include Margaret in *Richard III*, directed by Sam Mendes, at the Old Vic and subsequently on an international tour, *The Turn of the Screw* at the Almeida and *The Rivals*.

Principal Crew

Francis Lee, Writer-Director

Short biography

Francis Lee is a filmmaker working from Yorkshire, UK. Following an extensive career as an actor, he wrote his first short film, *Bantam*, in 2009, and went onto write and direct *The Farmer's Wife* in 2012, *Bradford-Halifax-London* in 2013 and *The Last Smallholder* in 2014 which collectively have played at many international film festivals winning numerous awards. *God's Own Country* is Francis' first feature film.

Long biography

Francis was brought up on his parents' farm on the Pennine Hills in Yorkshire, UK. After training at Rose Bruford College he worked extensively as an actor in theatre, television and film including *Topsy-Turvy*, *Me Without You*, *The Young Americans* and *Clapham Junction*.

Francis wrote his first short film, *Bantam* in 2010, which was commissioned and funded by North West Vision and the UK Film Council. *The Farmer's Wife*, Francis' 2012 directorial debut, premiered at Palm Springs International Film Festival and went on to screen at many international film festivals, winning several awards including best film and best screenplay. His second film *Bradford-Halifax-London*, in 2013, extensively toured the international film festival circuit including Slamdance Film Festival, Encounters and BFI London Film Festival receiving numerous awards for best film, best screenplay and best actor. His third film *The Last Smallholder*, shot in 2014, a meditative documentary about the last working farmer on a Yorkshire hillside (and Francis' father), has screened at many international film festivals including Hot Docs, Sheffield Doc/Fest and Palm Springs International Film Festival.

He is currently working on his next feature length film project *The Last Bus*, as well as developing an original TV series for Kudos.

God's Own Country is Francis' first feature film project.

Manon Ardisson, Producer

Manon Ardisson co-produced Jorge Thielen Armand's *La Soledad*, which premiered at the 2016 Venice Film Festival. Manon is now building her slate and financing her third feature *Treading Water*, written by Lee Mattinson, directed by Samuel de Ceccatty, and developed through Film London's Microwave scheme. Manon comes from a production background, and also worked as Creative Assistant at Paul Webster's Shoebox Films.

Jack Tarling, Producer

Jack Tarling founded Shudder Films in 2009, which has produced two feature films, *God's Own Country*, and *Await Further Instructions*, a mystery-sci-fi-horror directed by Johnny Kevorkian and starring David Bradley (*Game of Thrones*, *The Strain*). Shudder Films previously co-produced crime comedy *Hackney's Finest*.

Jack has also line produced four films for other companies including *Macbeth* for GSP Studios, and *Bypass* by Cannes Critics' Week director Duane Hopkins, and *Light Years* by BAFTA winner Esther May Campbell, for Third Films. Both were financed by the BFI and premiered in Venice. Prior to this, Jack's background in shorts included *Assessment*, which was short listed for a BAFTA and won the Film London Best of Boroughs jury prize in 2010.

Diarmid Scrimshaw, Executive Producer

Diarmid Scrimshaw is a triple BAFTA winning feature film producer and the managing director of UK based Inflammable Films. He's well known for his work with Paddy Considine and has also produced for directors Paul King, Richard Ayoade and Lynne Ramsay.

Anna Duffield, Executive Producer

Anna worked for leading Scottish production company Sigma Films for twelve years, assisting on all David Mackenzie projects, and co productions with Zentropa including *Dogville*, *Brothers* & *After The Wedding*.

She has produced a number of award winning short films including Johnny Barrington's *Trout* and *Terra Firma*, Jane Linfoot's BAFTA nominated *Sea View*, and co-produced Paddy Considine's BAFTA winning *Dog Altogether*.

After acting as associate producer on Andrea Arnold's *Red Road*, Anna went on to produce Morag McKinnon's *Donkeys*. Anna is currently developing feature film projects with Johnny Barrington, Jane Linfoot and Miranda Bowen.

More recently Anna has started working with Diarmid Scrimshaw's Inflammable Films, where she has been executive producing *God's Own Country* as well as working on a number of other projects on Inflammable's slate.

Joshua James Richards, Director of Photography

Joshua is an award-winning US-based cinematographer originally hailing from the coast of Cornwall in South West England. He was nominated for Best Cinematography at the 2016 Independent Spirit Awards and won Best Cinematography Debut at the 2015 Camerimage International Film Festival for his work on Chloé Zhao's critically acclaimed *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (Sundance, Cannes Directors' Fortnight, AFI). His work has been screened at festivals worldwide including the Berlin International Film Festival, SXSW, New Directors New Films, Telluride Film Festival and LA Film Festival. Josh received his MFA in Film Production from Tisch School of the Arts. Josh is represented by LA-based agency Artistry and United Agents in the UK

Chris Wyatt, Editor

Chris Wyatt is a film editor who has worked with an eclectic mix of directors ranging from Peter Greenaway to Shane Meadows.

Recent credits include the critically acclaimed '71 with Yann Demange and *Partisan* for Warp Films Australia.

Chris is currently editing *Calibre* with writer-director Matt Palmer.

Chris' other credits include *Dreams of a Life* and *The Falling*, TV series *Dancing on the Edge* and *Close to the Enemy*, and Ed Murrow's award winning documentary *The Lost Children of Berlin*.

Stéphane Collonge, Production Designer

Originating from France and now living in London, Stéphane Collonge has worked as Production Designer on many critically acclaimed British features. Stéphane collaborated

with Joanna Hogg on her debut feature *Unrelated* and subsequently went on to design *Archipelago* and *Exhibition*. He was also Production Designer for director Sally El Hosaini on her debut feature *My Brother The Devil* which picked up awards at Berlin International Film Festival, Sundance and the BIFAs and earned Sally El Hosaini the Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Newcomer. Stéphane designed Duane Hopkins' second feature, *Bypass*, starring George MacKay, which received its world premiere at Venice Int'l Film Festival 2014 and its UK premiere at the BFI London Film Festival. Stéphane also designed the satirical feature *Hippopotamus* in 2015, directed by John Jencks, an adaptation of Stephen Fry's novel which stars Roger Allam, Matthew Modine, Fiona Shaw and Russell Tovey.

Anna Bertmark, Sound Designer

Anna is a Swedish Sound Designer with more than a decade of experience, best known for her work on award-winning British independent films such as *Lilting* and Stephen Frears' Oscar®-winning film, *The Queen*. She has also supervised the sound post on the award winning *Adult Life Skills* which premiered at Tribeca, *Rate Me* which played Cannes Quinzaine, and BIFA winner *The Goob*. She runs her own sound design studio in Brighton, Attic Sound, and also freelances as a Sound Designer and Editor.

Sian Jenkins, Costume Designer

Sian graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama with a BA Hons in Theatre Design in 2001 and has worked extensively as a Costume Designer for film, television and theatre ever since. From Welsh-language television series *Gwaith/Cartref* (Nominee: Best Costume Design, British Academy Cymru Awards 2012) to Carol Morley's *The Falling* (Nominee: Best Film, London Film Festival 2014) and Nicolas Winding Refn's *Bronson* (World Cinema Dramatic Competition, Sundance 2009), her designs are united by both their authenticity and creativity.

Sian is currently designing the costumes for *Snatch*, the TV series based on the Guy Ritchie film of the same name, for Crackle.

Bean Ellis, Hair and Make Up Designer

Bean designed Hope Dickson Leach's debut feature *The Levelling* which had great success at Toronto Film Festival and BFI London Film Festival, earning the director the inaugural IWC Filmmaker Bursary Award. Prior to that Bean designed *Keeping Rosy* directed by Steve Reeves and featuring Maxine Peake, and the short *Dreamlands* directed by Sara Dunlop, which was in competition at Cannes 2016. Bean also designed the Scottish set thriller

Calibre directed by Matt Palmer and featuring Jack Lowden (*War & Peace*, *A United Kingdom*, *Tommy's Honour*) and Martin McCann (*The Survivalist*, '71).

GOD'S OWN COUNTRY - CREDITS

FRONT CREDITS

BFI animated Logo

Creative England animated Logo

BFI and Creative England present in association with Met Film

a Shudder Films and Inflammable Films production

MAIN TITLES

God's Own Country

a film by Francis Lee

Josh O'Connor

Alec Secareanu

with Gemma Jones

and Ian Hart

Produced by

Manon Ardisson

Jack Tarling

Executive Producers

Diarmid Scrimshaw

Anna Duffield

Executive Producers

Mary Burke

Celine Haddad

Paul Webster

Cavan Ash

Richard Holmes

Director of Photography

Joshua James Richards

Production Designer

Stéphane Collonge

Film Editor

Chris Wyatt

Sound Designer

Anna Bertmark

Costume Designer

Sian Jenkins

Hair and Make Up Designer

Bean Ellis

Production Sound Mixer

Phil Cape

Casting

Shaheen Baig

Layla Merrick-Wolf

Music

A Winged Victory For The Sullen

Written and Directed by

Francis Lee

END ROLLER

Produced by

Manon Ardisson

Jack Tarling

Cast

In order of appearance

Johnny Saxby	Josh O'Connor
Deirdre Saxby	Gemma Jones
Trainee Auctioneer	Harry Lister Smith
Martin Saxby	Ian Hart
Gheorghe Ionescu	Alec Secareanu
Gloria	Melanie Kilburn
Glen	Liam Thomas
Robyn	Patsy Ferran
Taxi Driver	Moey Hassan
Male Nurse	Naveed Choudhry
Joy	Sarah White
University Boy	John McCrea
Young Farm Worker	Alexander Suvandjiev
Bearded Farm Worker	Stefan Dermendjiev
Romanian Casting	Domnica Circiumaru
First Assistant Director	Ted Mitchell
Script Supervisor	Tamsin Spivey
Production Manager	Katie Bleakley
Production Accountant	Eddie Kane
Location Manager	Nardia Hall
Daily Production Manager	Kate Larking
Production Coordinator	Helen King
Production Trainee	Charanprite Dhami
Unit Manager	Andrew Henstock
Art Directors	Pedro Moura Celina Norris
Standby Art Director	Lottie McDowell
Standby Props	Luke Moran-Morris
Art Department Trainee	Charlie Austin
Art Department Driver	Mike Williams
Carpenter	Archie Knowles
Boom Operator	Lewis Birds
Second Assistant Director	Richard Harris
Third Assistant Director	Rebecca Heathcote

Floor Runner	Laxcha Bantawa
Set Trainee	Kofi Duodu
Runner / Driver	Stuart Large
Costume Supervisor	Carrie Wallbank
Make Up Trainee	Emily Dodge
Special Effects Teeth	Chris Lyons
Focus Pullers	Mitchell Thomas
	Alice Canty
Steadicam Operator	Dave Carey
Grip	Adam Cheetham
Clapper Loaders	Tom Evans
	Charlie Bradlaugh
	Steven Aitchison
Digital Imaging Technician	Mike Myshko
Camera Trainees	Nichola Hao
	Liam Rough
Gaffers	Jonathan Dew
	Simon Olney
Electricians	Mike Johnson
	John Crabtree
Fight Choreographer	Neil Tattersall
Animal Handler	Martin Preston
Additional Animal Handlers	Ian Boothman
	John Whitfield
Tracking Vehicles	Dave Anders
Dialect Coach	Laura Hart
Script Editor	Anna Seifert-Speck
Business Affairs, Kenren Media	Katharine Otway
Negative Checking	Sarah Hughes
Caterers	Stage 3 Catering
Chefs	Andy Wallace
	Andy Burns
Facilities Vehicles	Amro
Facilities Staff	Ian Kitchingham
	Stephen Butler

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Post Production supervisor Ben Nugent
VFX Supervisor Paddy Eason

‘Most People Get Married’
Performed by Patti Page
Composed by Earl Shuman and Leon Carr
Published by Chester Music Limited
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Courtesy of Mercury Nashville (United
States)
Under licence from Universal Music
Operations Ltd

‘Requiem For The Static King Part One’
Performed by A Winged Victory For The
Sullen
Composed by Dustin O’Halloran and Adam
Wiltzie
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Tapes

‘All Farewells Are Sudden’
Performed by A Winged Victory For The
Sullen
Composed by Dustin O’Halloran and
Adam Wiltzie
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‘I Always Get A Souvenir’
Performed by Buck Owens
Composed by Tommy Collins
Published by Chester Music Limited trading
as Campbell Connelly & Co
Courtesy of Buck Owens Private Foundation

‘The Lone Ranger’
Performed by George Jones
Written by Gerald Smith, John Northrup
and Billy Yates
Published by O-Tex Music (BMI), Chester
Music Limited trading as
Campbell Connelly & Co and
Universal/MCA Music Limited
Courtesy of MCA Nashville
Under license from Universal Music
Operations Ltd.

‘Minuet For A Cheap Piano Number Two’
Performed by A Winged Victory For The
Sullen
Composed by Dustin O’Halloran and Adam
Wiltzie
Published by Chester Music Limited trading
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Tapes

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Written and performed by Patrick Wolf
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Lee Hickman	Sean Kibbey
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Alex Mercer	Ian Benson
Charlotte Knight	Nicky Lee
Lizzie Francke	Scott Free
Simon Holloway	Hilary Davis

Filmed on location in Keighley, England

Whilst making this film animal welfare was paramount and animals involved were not harmed

Static Logos (in that order) for

Take 2

ProVision

Screen Archive South East

Shudder Films

Inflammable Films Ltd

Protagonist Pictures

Met Film Post

Creative England

iFeatures

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Static BFI Logo (BFI logo min 12mm high, Lottery logo minimum 7mm high)

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