

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The non-western films of John Ford -- excerpt</b>
Author(s)	Janey Ann Place
Source	<i>Citadel Press</i>
Date	1979
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	4
Subjects	Ford, John (1894-1973), Cape Elizabeth, Maine, United States
Film Subjects	Gideon of scotland yard, Ford, John, 1958

# GIDEON OF SCOTLAND YARD

## 1959

### CREDITS

*Production company:* British Productions-Columbia. *Director:* John Ford. *Producer:* Michael Killanin. *Associate producer:* Wingate Smith. *Scenarist:* T.E.B. Clarke, from the novel *Gideon's Day* by J.J. Marric (pseudonym for John Creasey). *Photography* (in color, but released in black and white): Frederick A. Young. *Art director:* Ken Adam. *Music:* Douglas Gamley. *Music Director:* Muir Mathieson. *Editor:* Raymond Poulton. *Assistant director:* Tom Pevsner. Filmed in London. 91 minutes. Released: February.

### CAST

Jack Hawkins (*Inspector George Gideon*), Dianne Foster (*Joanna Delafield*), Anna Massey (*Sally Gideon*), Cyril Cusack (*Herbert "Birdie" Sparrow*), Andrew Ray (*P.C. Simon Farnaby O'Green*), James Hayter (*Mason*), Ronald Howard (*Paul Delafield*), Howard Marion-Crawford (*Chief of Scotland Yard*), Laurence Naismith (*Arthur Sayer*), Derek Bond (*Det. Sgt. Eric Kirby*), Griselda Harvey (*Mrs. Kirby*), Frank Lawton (*Det. Sgt. Liggott*), Anna Lee (*Mrs. Kate Gideon*), John Loder (*Ponsford, "The Duke"*), Doreen Madden (*Miss Courtney*), Miles Malleson (*Judge at Old Bailey*), Marjorie Rhodes (*Mrs. Saparelli*), Michael Shepley (*Sir Rupert Bellamy*), Michael Trubshawe (*Sgt. Golightly*), Jack Watling (*Rev. Julian Small*), Hermione Bell (*Dolly Saparelli*), Donald Donnelly (*Fecney*), Billie Whitelaw (*Christine*), Malcolm Ranson (*Ronnie Gideon*), Mavis Ranson (*Jane Gideon*), Francis Crowdy (*Fitzhubert*), David Aylmer (*Manners*), Brian Smith (*White-Douglas*), Barry Keegan (*Riley, chauffeur*), Maureen Potter (*Ethel Sparrow*), Henry Longhurst (*Rev. Mr. Courtney*), Charles Maunsell (*Walker*), Stuart Saunders (*Chancery Lane policeman*), Dervis Ward (*Simmo*), Joan Ingram (*Lady Bellamy*), Nigel Fitzgerald (*Insp. Cameron*), Robert Raglan (*Dawson*), John Warwick (*Insp. Gillick*), John Le Mesurier (*prosecuting attorney*), Peter Godsell (*Jimmy*), Robert Bruce (*defending*



John Ford, Dianne Foster, and Jack Hawkins on the set of *Gideon of Scotland Yard*.

*attorney*), Alan Rolfe (*C.I.D. man at hospital*), Derek Prentice (*1st employee*), Alastair Hunter (*2nd employee*), Helen Goss (*woman employee*), Susan Richmond (*Aunt May*), Raymond Rollett (*Uncle Dick*), Lucy Griffiths (*cashier*), Mary Donevan (*usherette*), O'Donovan Shiell, Hart Allison, Michael O'Duffy (*policeman*), Diana Chesney (*barmaid*), David Storm (*court clerk*), Gordon Harris (*C.I.D. man*).

### SYNOPSIS

Inspector Gideon deals with murder, an overeager young patrolman who gives him traffic tickets but winds up as his son-in-law, graft inside his organization, and a comic, constantly interrupted dinner party.

In any artist's career there are bound to be not only failures, but works which are simply anomalies for that artist. They just don't seem to fit, either in his/her oeuvre, or in his/her development at the time they were made. *The Whole Town's Talking*, (1935), *Mogambo* in 1953, and *Gideon of Scotland Yard* are three such pictures. They are not the failures that *The Plough and the Stars* (1936) and *Four Men and a Prayer* (1938) are; they simply are out of step with Ford's usual artistic concerns, especially at that point in his career. It is easier to imagine almost any other director associated with the films. This poses many difficulties for a consideration of these films in a study of John Ford, where it is assumed that





Gideon is exasperated by his family,

the director's authorship insures a commonality of theme and visual style which can be informed by his other films. If this is not the case, the rather negative project of discussing how the film is unlike the rest of Ford's oeuvre seems the only course. It should be the case that the anomalies illuminate the rest of the films as well as vice versa, and this is clearly true of many films which are not in the mainstream of Ford's work, like *Arrowsmith*, *Wee Willie Winkie*, and *Mary of Scotland*. But it is not true of *Gideon*. Only some visual elements that Ford generally uses mark the director's hand, and even then they do not refer clearly to their use in other films.

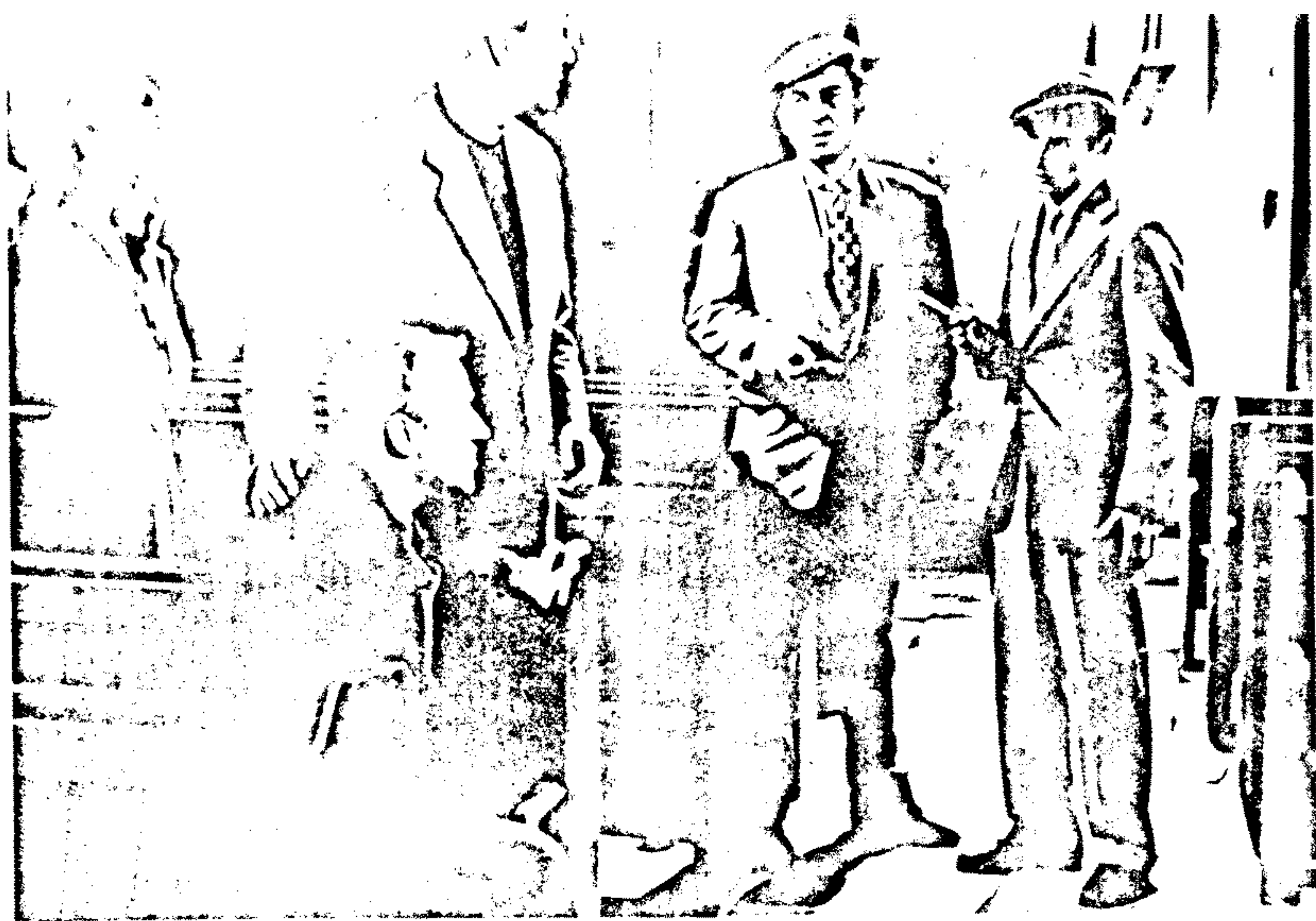
It is extremely difficult to rely on anything Ford says about his films. From what we learn from interviews, he must have been a totally intuitive artist with very little consciousness about the profound implications of his films. Yet he was interviewed countless times, loved the tough-man image, and was often ironic to an extent that an interviewer did not catch. When asked why he made so many Westerns, he said he liked to camp out in Monument Valley. Therefore his comment to Peter Bogdanovich about this film, "I wanted to get away for a while, so I said I'd like to do a Scotland Yard thing and we went over and did it,"

is given two traffic tickets by a young patrolman,



probably cannot be taken as an accurate reading of his interest in *Gideon*, but the film certainly indicates a low level. It is structured by a "day in the life" framework, held together by Gideon's (Jack Hawkins) voice narration and running between the comedy of his family life (complete with young patrolman who gives Inspector Gideon two traffic tickets and then turns out to be his





and prevents a murder, all in the course of a day's work.



All conflict is external instead of being reflective of inner forces of the characters and their relations.

future son-in-law), the action/drama of his professional life (complete with inter-Scotland Yard crime), crazy people, and a murderer. His two lives interrupt each other as he remembers he must buy fish in the middle of a case, and a crime takes him away from a dinner party. The mixture of comedy and action, and occasional heavy drama, are held together by voice-over narration. Ford even uses two flashbacks for the audience to witness an event we could not possibly have seen.

All this works pretty well; the problem with the film—both as a Ford film and as a piece of drama—is that there is no tension or conflict within the central characters. Plenty comes from his job, but Gideon himself becomes less and less compelling in spite of the comedy and the action, because all conflict is external and is in no way reflective of inner forces as action generally is in Ford's films. We identify with Gideon both dramatically and structurally because he narrates the film, and the level of identification is the same as in a routine action picture. We lack any psychological involvement which might resonate in our own lives. Thus the essential function of art in this culture, which is to liberate through emotions and sensual experience, is completely lost in this film. Ford's art, especially, is marked by its ability to reach out and touch the viewer in a profound way. As a light comedy *Gideon of Scotland Yard* is an adequate film, but in Ford's oeuvre it is totally inadequate.

Gideon attempts to deal with diplomats and an angry wife on the phone at the same time.







Gideon and his future son-in-law, receiving yet another traffic citation.

John Ford shooting *Gideon* of Scotland Yard.

