

Document Citation

Title	A hitherto unknown Chaplin Keystone film
Author(s)	Bo Berglund
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	1979
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Chaplin, Charlie (1889-1977), Walworth, London, Great Britain
Film Subjects	Tillie's punctured romance, Sennett, Mack, 1914 Tango tangles, Sennett, Mack, 1914 Hello Mabel, Normand, Mabel, 1914

a hitherto unknown chaplin FILM by bo berglund

One day in June 1978 I was standing in a library casually flipping through the pages of the 1946 edition of "Charles Chaplin" by Pierre Leprohon (casually because I had already read the 1970 edition of the same book many years earlier), when suddenly I caught sight of a picture that I had never seen before. It appeared that this photograph was proof of a hitherto unknown Chaplin film.

I marveled, and I still do, at the fact that it has been published and known for more than 30 years and that nobody seems to have realized its importance. And, incidentally, this particular photo is only reproduced in the editions of 1946 and 1957, not in that of 1970.

Now look at the picture above. There are some inferences to be drawn from it, and you need not be endowed with a deductive faculty of Holmesian proportions. Most conspicuous, Chaplin is entirely without make-up. We also recognize Mabel Normand. Consequently, it is a Keystone film, and the year must be 1914.

From the thin, black, perpendicular lines in this photo we may safely conclude that it is a frame enlargement and not some kind of private photo or publicity still taken at the Keystone Studio while Chaplin, dressed in his street clothes, happened to be visiting the set of some Mabel Normand film in which he was not cast.

How many Keystone films are there in which Chaplin wears no make-up? He is without his usual tramp costume in a couple of films, but there is only one single film in which he is entirely without make-up, and that is TANGO TANGLES.

If you have seen the film (and seeing all the early Chaplin films is a prerequisite for this investigation) you know that it cannot come from this one. In TANGO TANGLES Chaplin wears a dark suit and a derby and Mabel and the other fellow, whom I cannot identify, do not appear in the film. Neither would such a scene fit the story.

On the other hand, he wears a straw-hat in TILLIE'S PUNCTURED ROMANCE. This film has been trimmed and reissued many times. Could it be a scene from TILLIE'S PUNCTURED ROMANCE? Could it be an early out-take which does not appear in any existing version of the film? This would be plausible but for one small detail. In TILLIE Charlie wears a thin moustache with a break in the middle, whereas here he wears none at all. So TILLIE'S PUNCTURED



HELLO MABEL

ROMANCE is ruled out.

The general opinion is that Chaplin made 35 films for Keystone, and I have implied that I had seen them all. However, I have only seen 34, since one film, HER FRIEND THE BANDIT, is still missing and considered "lost." We know that in this film Chaplin plays the role of a bandit who waylays a count, dons his clothes, and, posing as the count, visits a party (some say masquerade) given by Mabel. In the end his outrageous conduct forces Mabel to call the cops.

Mabel plays a high society lady, but in the illustration she does not look the part; nor would she be using a switchboard in her own private home, however posh. Furthermore Charlie would not sit calmly waiting for her to call the police.

It is also highly improbable, not to say impossible, that he, either as the bandit or the count, would be totally without make-up. Even if we assume that Charlie has just been unmasked, he would have been unmasked as the bandit, not as his own private self.

If we should be unwilling to accept the theory of an unknown Chaplin film, there is now only one possibility: it must come from some unreleased footage, such as a test or an unfinished film.

It was almost a year before I had the opportunity to pursue the matter. In April 1979 I sent a letter to Mr. Maurice Bessy in Paris, to whose collection this photograph belongs. I asked about the photograph's origin and he graciously sent me a rapid reply. My conclusions were fully confirmed.

As a boy in the mid-20s, Mr. Bessy knew a projectionist in Nice, and from him he collected those small pieces of film consisting of one or two frames which the operator had to sacrifice each time he made a splice. Mr. Bessy does not know exactly when he acquired this particular frame, but he guesses 1926.

It was not until many years later, while he was assorting his collection of film fragments, that he recognized Chaplin in a certain frame and had a

photograph made from it. Some years ago he sent a copy of this photo to Chaplin himself, asking him to identify it. It was returned by the secretary saying Chaplin was in poor health.

Now this proves that the film has been shown theatrically, at least in France in the '20s. Ergo it is an unknown film. Q.E.D.

This does not come as a surprise to one who knows about the working methods at Keystone. I have always suspected that if we could screen all the Sennett films of 1914, there would be a fair chance of seeing some Chaplin cameo appearances.

According to Robert Florey, who talked to Chaplin in the early '20s and who later was to become his co-director on MONSIEUR VERDOUX, Chaplin said that anybody could at any time be called upon to play any role; nobody was considered to be too big to do even the smallest part.

Let me give you an example. Fatty Arbuckle is seen as a bartender in Chaplin's HIS NEW PROFESSION. He is on screen for just about 15 seconds, and nobody seems to have noticed him since he is not credited with the part in any Chaplin filmography, nor in the Arbuckle filmography compiled by Sam Gill and published in "The Day the Laughter Stopped" by David Yallop (an excellent book which I heartily recommend to everyone who is interested in the Arbuckle case).

But what is the title of the film? Well, now we need all the acumen we can muster, because Sennett produced 150 films in 1914 and most of them have vague — sometimes almost interchangeable — non-descript titles such as LOVE AND GASOLINE, LOVE AND BULLETS, THOSE HAPPY DAYS, HER LAST CHANCE, FATTY AGAIN, DASH LOVE AND SPLASH etc... etc... Under these circumstances, what are the chances of finding the title of the film to which this scene belongs? Probably infinitesimal.

Let us look at the picture again. What is actually going on? Mabel is wearing headphones. She is sitting at

what appears to be a small switchboard. She is obviously functioning as a switchboard operator, at least temporarily. While Charlie sits waiting, the other man seems to point to a certain number in a telephone directory urgently begging her to make a call.

It was entirely without any hope of success that I set out to check the list of Keystone films produced in 1914. A few titles had a ring of plausibility; for example, MABEL'S NEW JOB.

As I proceeded down the list, I found HELLO MABEL. At first I thought that this was just another of those vague titles that could suit almost any film, but then I saw that the working title of this film was "The Hello Girl." Bingo! Admittedly, this was a tremendous stroke of sheer luck.

In Moving Picture World, October 17, 1914, we read: HELLO MABEL/

Keystone/ released Oct. 8 — "In this number Mabel Normand plays the telephone girl in a hotel. A man flirts with her, creating jealousy on the part of the wife. As handled, the plot is very obscure in meaning until toward the last. Not a very strong subject; the photography is uneven."

I now call upon all film collectors and curators of Film Archives to look for HELLO MABEL in their collections. It may, perhaps, also have some other reissue titles. I think that the chance of finding it is very small indeed. But on the other hand it is just possible that whoever has this film in his possession has not recognized Chaplin in plain clothes, especially if he is on the screen for a very short while.

I believe that it has been proven that, from now on, we must begin to speak of Chaplin's 36 Keystone films, and not 35. As for the title of this 36th film, I think, at least for the time being until some further evidence is found, that HELLO MABEL is a very good working hypothesis. ●

Chaplin, Charles

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN CHAPLIN KEYSTONE FILM

Postscript

This article was written in 1979. Since then, to my astonishment, another photo from the same film has been published in Maurice Bessy's Charlie Chaplin, Thames & Hudson, 1985. This new photo is on page 25 - the other one is reproduced on page 46.

I therefore contacted Mr. Bessy once more, wondering how many stills from this film he actually had in his collection. Only these two, he said in his reply, and they come from the same source: a small fragment of film that no longer exists, alas. The laboratory that made the frame enlargements closed down without returning this piece of film.

Above is a quotation from *The Moving Picture World*; here is what *The Motion Picture News* of October 24, 1914, had to say about *HELLO MABEL*:

This is quite an incoherent comedy, but will produce laughs in places. Mabel Normand as a telephone girl gets herself, her lover, and a wedded couple into all manner of mixups by her telephonic personality.

HELLO MABEL was imported to Sweden in 1918. Among the old papers of the Swedish Board of Film Censors I have found the following synopsis:

Mabel is a telephone operator in a hotel and she is engaged to a young man who happens to run across Ambrose and his wife in the hotel lobby. Here a situation arises which makes Ambrose jealous; he mistakenly thinks the young man is flirting with his wife. Ambrose informs Mabel and tells her to let him know if anything should happen to confirm his suspicions. Now it is Mabel's turn to misconstrue a situation into believing that the flirt between Mrs. Ambrose and her fiancé is still on; under the impression that they are together in the same room Mabel phones Ambrose who is at a board meeting, and he dashes back to the hotel in furious anger. But it so happens that Ambrose himself is the one who gets compromised when he is found in a closet together with Mabel by his wife who gives him a sound thrashing. But, of course, in the end all the misunderstandings are straightened out.

From dozens of other Keystone films we know that the Ambrose character always is played by Mack Swain; we may therefore safely assume that he is in this film too, together with Mabel and Charlie.

In 1979 I thought *HELLO MABEL* was a good working hypothesis. Since then I have grown more and more confident that this must be the film in question and the one we should be searching for.