

K graphic

## The Amazing Mr Blunden

UK : 1972 : dir. Lionel Jeffries : Hemdale : 99 min  
prod: Barry Levinson : scr: Lionel Jeffries : dir.ph.: Gerry Fisher  
*Garry Miller; Lynne Frederick; Marc Granger; Rosalyn Landor* .....  
Laurence Naismith; Diana Dors; James Villiers; Madeline Smith; David Lodge; Dorothy Alison  
Stuart Lock; Deddie Davis

| Ref:  | Pages | Sources | Stills | Words | Ω □ ♀ Z ♀ | Copy on VHS | Last Viewed |
|-------|-------|---------|--------|-------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| 2065b | 3½    | 14      | 3      | 1,770 | 3 7 7 - 7 | No          | c1992       |



*Lynne Frederick looks on while brother Garry Warren gets acquainted with an agreeable old spirit...*

*Source: Film Review 1973-74*

### Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide review:

"Dickensian fantasy about a genial ghost who takes two children back in time to help two mistreated tots. Colourful family film whose only liability is a somewhat muddled storyline. \*\*\* "

**Speelfilm Encyclopedie** review - identical to above

### Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In 1918, a widow and her two children meet a kindly gentleman who offers them work in his old mansion. Here they meet two ghost children, discover that he is a ghost too, and travel a hundred years back in time to right a wicked wrong. Involved ghost story for intellectual children, made generally palatable by oodles of period charm and good acting. \*\* "

"Easy period charm.. fills every crevice."  
— Clyde Jeavons

### Film Review 1973-74 review:

"Following up his big success with his first film-directing assignment ("**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**") actor Lionel Jeffries stayed with the youngsters in his Hemdale movie "**THE AMAZING MR BLUNDEN**", in which Lynne Frederick and Garry Miller played the girl and boy who get a chance to go backwards in time to help two other children of a century back. And Laurence Naismith played Mr B."

"Charming children's ghost story about two children, having a grim Christmas in their London flat after their father has been killed in the Second World War<sup>1</sup>, who are suddenly confronted by the nice old ghost of Mr B who takes them back a hundred years to save another couple of children from the horrors of nasty old uncle Bertie, the villain!"

### Sight and Sound – Winter 72/73 – review:

"As if to prove that "**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**" was no flash in the pan, Lionel Jeffries has adapted and directed another novel for children. "**THE AMAZING MR BLUNDEN**" (Hemdale) bears several similarities to E. Nesbitt's story. A fatherless family in straitened circumstances, befriended by an elderly gentleman, is suddenly translated to a house in a country village.

But this time there is something strange about the benevolent gentleman, Mr Blunden (Laurence Naismith). He is a ghost, and the house in the country is a broken-down mansion, reputed to be haunted. The young brother and sister, James and Lucy, soon discover the source of the haunting to be two children who had lived in the mansion a hundred years earlier and died in a terrible fire. The ghost children beg the help of the newcomers, who agree to travel back in time with the aid of a useful potion and try to help change the course of the tragedy.

The opening sequences – London streets at Christmas, the family in a squalid flat, Mr Blunden appearing like a good fairy out of the snow – is pleasantly Dickensian. The time is 1918, and the period is established with that flair for precise detail which is a feature of Jeffries' style. His serious, non-condescending approach draws marvellously matter-of-fact performances from all four children, but he can

---

<sup>1</sup> Wrong war.

hardly claim credit for the work of a baby who effortlessly steals every scene he appears in.

Jeffries' laconic method assumes acceptance of the supernatural with an agreeable common sense which stays on the safe side of smugness, and his ghosts are splendidly solid. Unfortunately, this down to earth attitude is not quite consistently followed. While the ghost children are in a sense as true to life as their living friends, their wicked uncle and his confederates are caricatures from a nightmare. This is obviously a deliberate effect, perhaps intended to offset fear by its very unreality, but it is miscalculated. These grotesques (including Diana Dors, overplaying wildly as a wicked housekeeper) are not quite absurd enough to be funny and too repellent to amuse.

But the fire which is the adventure's climax is real enough, and handled with an almost Hitchcockian screwing of suspense. While it can be enjoyed in the comfortable conviction that all will come right in the end, the happy conclusion is withheld for an agonising length of time. This determination to get full value out of the material without dilution or sentimentality is perhaps the key to Jeffries' success. It is a compliment to child audiences which their parents will appreciate."

– Brenda Davies

"A ghost story for children with an almost Dickensian flavour. Lionel Jeffries again shows a sure touch with youngsters, though his villains (including Diana Dors) are much larger than life.<sup>2</sup>"

### The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"Superior junior-oriented story of two children going with their mother to live in what turns out to be a kindly ghost's house. They are taken back in time and foil a dastardly plot. Lynne Frederick did particularly well as the girl, in 1972, backed up by Laurence Naismith as the ghost and Diana Dors as a wicked old woman from the past. Director Lionel Jeffries managed it all beautifully. \*\*"

---

<sup>2</sup> Which is only another way of saying that, as with so many other British children's films, while the children play their roles perfectly straight, the adults overact shamelessly in the belief that kids' entertainment consists chiefly of grown-ups making fools of themselves. Not much respect for the audience evinced by **that** approach. And I rather suspect that "the key to Jeffries' success" lies in making films with more than half an eye for the taste of parents.

**The Time Out Film Guide** review:

“A fine adaptation of Antonia Barber’s novel “The Ghosts”, which begins with a quiet nostalgia reminiscent of Jeffries’ earlier “**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**”: a cosy suburban house, a death, and then the miraculous translation of a widowed mother and her children to a cottage in the country. The translator is a friendly ghost (Naismith), and in the crumbling old mansion where their mother is now caretaker, James and Lucy are drawn into a strange adventure where they find themselves going back 100 years to save another brother and sister from being hounded to death for their money. Handled with that sense of enchanted stillness which is one of Jeffries’ great gifts as a director, the apparitions, the apprehensions, and the atmosphere of brooding menace about the house are exquisitely done.”

**TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995** review:

“Lionel Jeffries’ second venture into direction: although not as overwhelmingly popular as his first film, “**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**”, this is every bit as good. The remarkably self-assured performance by Lynne Frederick, as the elder of two children involved with ghosts from a century before, is better than anything else in either film. \*\*\* ”

**Video Movie Guide 1993** review:

“Neat little ghost story about children from the twentieth century (Lynne Frederick, Garry Miller) helping right a wrong done 100 years previously. Laurence Naismith is the mysterious (and amazing) Mr Blunden, a nineteenth-century lawyer who is at home in the twentieth century. The children seem a little old to be involved in this type of adventure, but on the whole the story is delightful. \*\*\* ”

[no listing in “The Critics’ Film Guide”, “The Good Film and Video Guide”, “Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89”, “Rating the Movies (1990)”, “Variety Movie Guide 1993” or “The Virgin Film Guide”]

**Radio Times** review:

“In his later years character actor Lionel Jeffries has had a secondary career as a sympathetic director of films made for and about young people<sup>3</sup>, notably “**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**”. This Antonia Barber period ghost story is perfectly suitable for adult viewing as well; there’s so much to enjoy, especially in the ripe performances from Laurence Naismith in the title role, and from the splendid Diana Dors as Mrs Wickens, gross and warty and every young child’s nightmare. \*\*\* ”

**What’s On TV** review:

“A British version of “**BACK TO THE FUTURE**” – minus Michael J Fox and the stunning special effects<sup>4</sup>. Some youngsters are transported back to the early 1900s to put right a wrong. Laurence Naismith, Diana Dors and David Lodge contribute to the ghostly goings-on in this charming period piece. 333 ”

“Dickensian-style family fun. A poor and fatherless family meet a mysterious benefactor, who turns out to be a friendly ghost who takes them on a time-travel adventure.”

**The Sunday Times** note:

“Children’s adventure starring Laurence Naismith.”

**Daily Mirror** note:

“Edwardian children meet a friendly ghost who needs their help in righting a long-gone wrong. Densely-plotted adventure, plushly mounted. \*\*\* ”

Source unknown:

“Quality kids’ time-travel-and-ghosties yarn, fuelled by a stalwart Brit line-up.”

Jacket notes from paperback tie-in:

“It was such an old house it sometimes seemed to Lucy that all the past was gathered up inside it as if in a great box; as though it had a life of its own that continued to exist just beyond the reach of her eyes and ears. And did the

---

<sup>3</sup> Or “children”, as we say in English

<sup>4</sup> Absurd comparison

amazing Mr Blunden, who knew so much about them, mean to hurt or help them? Could she really help those troubled ghosts from another age?"

Released on Christmas Eve 1972. So much quiet praise was heaped on this film that I watched it in high hopes, but it – and Lionel Jeffries as director – are very over-rated. After a promising opening it defaults to the British children's film norm of grotesquely over-acting adults and politely-spoken kids who never lose, never get hurt and always eat their greens. Its sensibilities are those of the Sunday teatime TV serial: safe and edifying, but one looks in vain for any solidity or hardness. So far from being steeped in atmosphere, the haunted house is not very creepy, the ghosts are as corporeal as the living, and there is no sense at all of displacement to the unfamiliar when Lucy and her brother quaff their magic potion and whisk themselves back half a century. There's a reek of roast ham during the climactic fire, but no sense of real danger, and to top it all the "young people" who carry the action forward are mere cyphers, without recognisable personality – more so than in "**THE RAILWAY CHILDREN**", for example.

Neither Garry Miller nor Marc Granger are listed in *The Moving Picture Boy*, but Miller (here playing James) was Marty Feldman's son Richard, 11, in the awful sex comedy "**EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE ONE**" (70), and had the title role in the children's TV time travel series "**Jamie**" (71). Rosalyn Landor had a small part as Peggy – menaced by the spider in the magic circle scene – in "**THE DEVIL RIDES OUT**" (68). Nothing else is known of Lynne Frederick (as a child actress).

See subject index under **GHOSTS & HAUNTINGS, HISTORY, MOVING HOME, ORPHANS / ADOPTION** and under **SCIENCE FICTION** for other time travel stories.