



# Enduring storm

As the UK's most famous film studio celebrates its 83rd year, **Sean Wilson** looks back on the storied and extraordinary history of Pinewood, home to many cult films

**J**ames Bond. Star Wars. Harry Potter. Three gargantuan franchises connected by more than just box office receipts and a global fanbase. The common denominator sits in the unassuming village of Iver Heath, 30 kilometres west of London. It's no Hollywood but it has acted

**Above: Stormtroopers on set filming *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* at Pinewood Studios in 2017**

as one of the hubs of global moviemaking since the early 20th century. It's home to one of the most revered and enduring film studios in the world: Pinewood.

The name alone invokes nostalgic pleasure for movie fans. Pinewood houses the famous 007 stage, built for 1977 James Bond adventure *The Spy Who Loved Me* before burning down during production of Ridley Scott fantasy *Legend* in 1984 (it was

rebuilt soon after before suffering another blaze in 2006). It's at Pinewood that JJ Abrams housed the Millennium Falcon during the shooting of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (later, Rian Johnson would utilise Pinewood for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*). And, on a decidedly more humble note, the studio and its surrounding environs were also the home of the classic British *Carry On* films. Barbara Windsor's infamous wardrobe

malfunction in *Carry on Camping* was filmed on-site, with surrounds spray-painted green to disguise the dull autumnal conditions.

Taking into account its merger (as of 2001) with the nearby Shepperton Studios, as well as its ownership of a multitude of other sites, Pinewood now comprises 40 stages in total.

So how did the studio come about, and how did a quiet pocket of middle-England become a major magnet for the Tinseltown elite?

Built on the site of a former Victorian house (and later country club), Pinewood as we know it began life in 1935. The studio first took shape when flour magnate turned film impresario J. Arthur Rank (who later founded film distribution ▶



company the Rank Organisation) joined forces with building tycoon Charles Boot (responsible for the aforementioned country club). Construction began in December 1935 and the studio officially opened in September 1936, drawing heavily on Hollywood industrial practices including the 'unit system' of several productions being shot on the lot simultaneously.

Noteworthy early success stories included David Lean's defining adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Powell and Pressberger's sumptuous *The Red Shoes*. But perhaps the moment the studio became entrenched in the global consciousness was when the James Bond movies set up base there, from 1962's *Doctor No* onwards. The nearby Stoke Poges Golf Club was also immortalised in Sean Connery's third Bond movie *Goldfinger*, replete with statue-decapitating punchline courtesy of villain Oddjob (Harold Sakata).

Pinewood became increasingly intertwined with the 007

mythology upon construction of the famed 007 stage in 1977. Conceived by production designer Ken Adam to accommodate the vast sets needed for film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (principally the submarine-devouring interior of tanker ship the *Liparus*), the stage was hailed as a feat of contemporary engineering.

That the 007 sound stage has survived two devastating fires is emblematic of Pinewood's staying power. The studio has weathered several bumpy patches in British film history, including the early 1970s (during which time it was used for Roger Moore/Tony Curtis series *The Persuaders*)

and the early 1990s, when the lack of government tax reliefs made the UK a less-than-desirable place to shoot.

Even so, Pinewood, now under the umbrella of The Pinewood Studios Group, has weathered the storms: in 2013 the studio opened its first American facility in Atlanta, Georgia, and the first film to shoot there was Marvel adventure *Ant-Man*. And in 2014, Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studios was opened, hosting facilities for a multitude of TV productions including *Asia's Got Talent*. Additional studios can be found in Berlin, Teddington (London) and Toronto.

Recent Bond movies have continued to uphold Pinewood as the spiritual home of the world's most famous secret agent. All of Daniel Craig's movies, beginning with *Casino Royale*, have been shot there, and the studio has also become the home for many entries in the template-redefining Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), including 2014's *Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2015's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and 2016's *Doctor Strange*.

Late James Bond actor Roger Moore described Pinewood as his "second home" and praised its "charm and warmth". Fittingly enough, he now has a stage named after him. And the studio's future seems safe, not only thanks to the presence of modern day epics like *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, starring Angelina Jolie (set for release in October 2019), but also due to wider industrial changes within the film industry itself. Streaming mogul Netflix is making further incursions into the studio-dominated landscape, and is looking to secure a deal to lease space at Pinewood for the next ten years. And with that, another fascinating chapter opens up at the nexus of the British film industry. [pinewoodstudios.com](http://pinewoodstudios.com) ■

**Top:** Daniel Craig as 007 in *Skyfall* at Pinewood in 2012  
**Right:** The famous entrance

