

# BRITISH BOARD OF FILM CENSORS

3, SOHO SQUARE, W.1

President: The Rt. Hon. THE LORD HARLECH, K.C.M.G.

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"CENSORSHIP, PHONE,  
LONDON."

No. .... Please Receive the following Films for Censorship..... **28<sup>th</sup> JAN 1974** .....

No. For use by the Board only.	EXAMINER. For use by the Board only.	TITLE. To be filled in by the Publisher.	LENGTH: ft. To be filled in by the Publisher.	FEE. To be filled in by the Publisher.	
				£	p
G 06739		<u>THE EXORCIST</u> 24 <u>35<sup>m</sup>/m FEATURE</u> <u>STANDARD RATIO 1x1.75</u> <u>10,949 FT 2 HOURS 2 mins</u>			
					£ 117.17 X 98' New cert issued 14/8/90 JF

Name of Publisher.....  
.....

11th April 1974

CONFIDENTIAL

City of Coventry  
The Council House  
COVENTRY

Dear

I refer to your telephone conversation with this office yesterday and with me this morning, and now send you my comments on the film "THE EXORCIST". It is my view that this film is a social phenomenon rather than strictly a matter of censorship. It seems to have been released in America at a particular moment when, for various reasons, there was wide national interest in the occult. We ourselves regret that in America the censorship awarded the film a rating which admits children. The result was that the film had attracted enormous press attention before it was shown publicly in Britain. There was no reason to suppose that the social phenomenon peculiar to America would be repeated here. Nevertheless, an atmosphere of such hysteria was engendered just before the film was first shown in London that one young lady reportedly fainted before seeing the film. It is noticeable that since the film has been running in London and in other cities the hysteria has died down and with it the accounts of almost mystical powers that were attributed to the film. It seems now to be accepted for what it is - a very good horror movie. Inevitably, in view of the publicity, the film was seen during its first few days by representatives of public bodies, by a large number of psychiatrists and by many churchmen. To the best of my knowledge and belief no British psychiatrist has suggested that the film will do harm, no official body intends to proceed against it (and, indeed, the Solicitor General's Office is reported as having said that it will take no action) and a number of churchmen have expressed their support for the film. A number of Local Authorities have seen the film and so far all have upheld our certification.

One element in the controversy is within the churches themselves. There seem to be clergymen prepared to argue on the one hand that the film, although its view of good and evil is very much over-simplified, is of value; others maintain that exorcism does not represent the kind of Christianity which is relevant to our own times. A second element in the controversy is that the critics in Britain dislike the film very much. On the other hand, and not for the first time, the public is not accepting the critics' view.

Continued .....

11th April 1974

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The film has also won two "Oscars" which, as the Committee will be aware, are the most important of all international awards in the cinema. A third problem is the success of the book which is, in my view, more powerful than the film. Children of any age can buy a copy of "THE EXORCIST" which is reported to have sold some 14 million copies, thus reaching a potential readership higher than the audience so far for the film.

May I repeat that the film is much less a problem of censorship than a social phenomenon? There is some bad language, there is a very brief reference, though visually not explicit, to an incident in the book in which the child masturbates with a cross. For the rest it is a powerful horror movie. Some people may dislike it, but that is not a sufficient reason for refusing certification.

Finally, one must speculate on a strange phenomenon of the last three or four years. Throughout its history the cinema has shocked, horrified and distressed some people. This has always, until recently, been held to be a legitimate kind of cinema, provided children were excluded and provided adults knew to what they were exposing themselves.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Murphy

Dictated by Stephen Murphy and signed in his absence

# BRITISH BOARD OF FILM CLASSIFICATION

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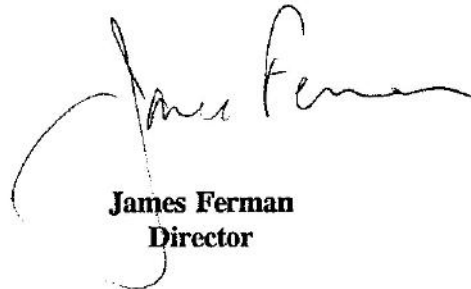
10th December 1993

## THE EXORCIST

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the release of THE EXORCIST on video. This film was recently re-released theatrically in its uncut form and has been showing throughout the country. It has not, however, been approved for release on video under the terms of the Video Recordings Act 1984. The reason is that under that Act the Board must consider the work's suitability for viewing in the home, where there is far less control of audience age. Our files are full of evidence of the number of young teenagers who managed to see the film in the cinema when it was first released and who found it seriously disturbing.

Given the recent concern about the large numbers of children who manage to see '18' videos in the home, with or without their parents' permission, the Board has been worried about the possibility that immature girls will be drawn to this particular video because the central character is a 12-year-old girl. We have too much evidence of teenagers being disturbed by it in the cinema, particularly girls, as well as advice from child psychologists that it could be seriously disturbing to young people of this age. Reluctantly therefore, since we recognise the quality of the film, we have concluded that, for the time being, its place is in the cinema rather than in the home.

Yours sincerely,



**James Ferman**  
Director