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Pinewood Studios – Purveyor of Dreams to The World. (1260 words)

Michael Percy discovers what magic has been created during the famous studio's seventy-fifth year in the dream business

As you enter Pinewood Studios you could be forgiven for assuming you have made a mistake and driven into a container port. There is a huge wall of shipping containers piled high to support a vast green screen – this is big, the size of a football pitch on its side. In front of the screen is a medieval castle so you can safely surmise this is not Felixstowe. Next you see a vast building with a sign reading *007 Stage* and you notice you are driving along Goldfinger Avenue; now you know for sure, this is Pinewood Studios – dream factory to the world.

This year Pinewood has been celebrating 75 years at the heart of world cinema and looking ahead with plans for a housing scheme called *Project Pinewood* which will double as a film location, and actively investing in British movies made by British talent.

The latest project to hit Pinewood is the new James Bond film called *Skyfall*. Daniel Craig will play Bond for the third time with Javier Bardem as his villainous adversary. London actress Naomie Harris will play a fellow field agent called Eve and the coveted roll of Bond Girl Séverine landed in the lap of French actress Bérénice Marlohe.

Film makers rarely reveal the plots of their films so the story outline for *Skyfall* is vague. It does reveal that *007 must track down and destroy the threat to MI5, no matter how personal the cost*. That reference to a 'personal cost' hints that at least one or possibly both Bond girls will not make it to the final credits along with Bardem's villainous character – possibly.

The official announcement of the cast and the title was made exactly to the day on the fiftieth anniversary (November third) of Sean Connery signing up to make *Dr No* which was the first Bond film. *Skyfall* is the twenty-third Bond and those fifty years make this particular movie series almost half as old as the film industry itself which was just making its mark as a new form of entertainment at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It was the life of one movie pioneer which was the inspiration for a children's book that in turn inspired Martin Scorsese to make the modern movie *Hugo*, a 3D fantasy filmed at Pinewood which will be in cinemas before Christmas.

That pioneer, Georges Méliès, made a silent film in 1902 called *A Voyage to the Moon (Viaje a la Luna)* which has become a cinema classic. Méliès also collected automata (clockwork toys) and sold toys on Parisian railway stations.

His life story partly inspired Brian Selznick's book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and this became the movie that Scorsese called *Hugo*. In the film, Méliès, played by Ben Kingsley, lives again and perhaps Martin Scorsese was paying a small homage to a cinema pioneer in making this movie. The film includes a scene showing Méliès selling toys on a railway station.

*Hugo* was a big budget feature film but Pinewood's new funding initiative – *Pinewood Films* – is aimed at giving a break to new talent and productions with modest budgets. Pinewood is currently co-funding a British comedy starring Simon Pegg called *A Fantastic Fear Of Everything*.

The movie is expected to be released next summer. A second film, the thriller *Last Passenger*, is also getting the benefit of Pinewood finance in a deal with The British Film Institute. These new ventures were not filmed at Pinewood but at Shepperton Studios which is owned by The Pinewood Group. The company also owns Teddington Studios and has large studios in Canada, Germany, Malaysia and The Dominican Republic.

The Caribbean, particularly The Dominican Republic, was the exotic location for The Pirates of the Caribbean series with Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow. But once the exteriors were in the can the production returned to Pinewood to complete *Pirates of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* and occupied most of the stages to finish filming. The Iwer countryside must be like a second home to Johnny Depp since he went on to join forces with Michelle Pfeiffer at Pinewood to make *Dark Shadows*, a gothic-horror American TV spin-off.

Movie Stars are renowned for having their luxury trailers on set and Johnny Depp made his more homely with a patch of Buckinghamshire grass laid in front of the trailer for his children to play on. Pinewood has a great community feel because all the professionals there have a common goal of creating great entertainment, and stars like Depp fit well into this focussed but friendly atmosphere.

One film with an American main character but a decidedly British story is *My Week With Marilyn*. This tells the true-life story of Colin Clark, an assistant to Laurence Olivier during the filming of *The Prince and The Showgirl* in 1956. Clark, played by Eddie Redmayne, becomes a kind of reality buffer between the fiery Olivier and emotional Marilyn Monroe. He spends a week with Marilyn showing her aspects of England she had not seen before. The movie includes scenes shot at White Waltham Airfield, Windsor Castle, the banks of the Thames and Eton College which the actor Redmayne attended as a boy, just like the real Colin Clark.

During its seventy-five year history, Pinewood has been a provider of services to film and television; a landlord who rents space to film makers and the movie craftsmen. But they do it in a big way. Pinewood preserves the vital skills the film industry needs and is home to nearly 300 separate businesses involved in servicing the dream factory. From painting scenery and catering to creating the latest computer generated visual effects, it is all here. A producer need only pick up the phone and he can summon a craft person to fashion a gargoye from

plaster or a chiropractor who can massage away the cares of a harassed movie mogul.

As well as being a purveyor of dreams, Pinewood is also a modern business. Another new venture called Project Pinewood is part of the strategy the studio has in place to ensure its future in a famously risky business. The plan is to develop the creative hub aspect of the studio – that means all the little businesses that exist there – and build housing in the style of famous world cities – Venice, Amsterdam, Prague and New York. So it will be possible to live in a Venice look-a-like setting and come home from work to find a film crew shooting on your doorstep. It is part of the plan that these housing developments will double as film locations saving the cost of filming in the real cities.

Project Pinewood is only at the planning stage and there are local objections to the proposal which involves a large site adjacent to the studios. It is claimed that green belt land will be lost but like a good movie, this story will unfold in an exciting way and probably reach a dramatic climax.

Life began for Pinewood Studios in 1936 when the first film to be produced there was released. *Talk of The Devil* was a crime drama directed by Carol Reed. In 1937 twenty-six films were completed but by the end of 1938 the studio had closed due to financial problems. Producing propaganda films during the Second World War got the arc lamps burning again and Pinewood has kept the cameras turning ever since.

Now Pinewood faces the future with the confidence that the end credit so familiar on British and international films – *Made at Pinewood Studios London England* – will never fade from our cinema screens.