



**THE MAKING OF LIVING  
AT THE ATHENÆUM**



**LONDON**

*Living (2022) courtesy of Lionsgate*

**S**et in London in 1953, *Living* follows Mr Williams (Bill Nighy), a bureaucrat who discovers he has a terminal illness. This news prompts him to re-evaluate his life, which includes developing a new friendship with a young woman, Margaret (Aimee Lou Wood). Film London's Winona Navin-Holder spoke to Avril Shoreland, Deputy Secretary at The Athenæum and Angus Ledgerwood, Supervising Location Manager, about their shared experiences with the film.

**Avril, how long did you have *Living* filming with you at The Athenæum?**

**Avril Shoreland:** *Living* only filmed at the Club for one day, but we managed to cover a lot in that time!

**Could you tell me a little bit about which scenes filmed at the Club, and whether the location was used for any notable moments that audiences might recognise?**

**Angus Ledgerwood:** The Athenæum was used as a double for Fortnum & Mason, the department store in London, but taking the store back to the 1950s. The current Fortnum & Mason has been updated in style and décor considerably since the 50s, and it would have been

impractical to dress it back to its former state. The Athenæum offered a fantastic canvas that our production designers could then build upon, to recreate the character that once was. The scene we filmed at the club depicts a really lovely moment of friendship building, between Mr Williams and Miss Harris. The scene makes up about five minutes of screen time, allowing the audience to get a great feeling for the character and level of class that would have been served up in the F&M team room 70 years ago.

(Image courtesy of Lionsgate)

**AS:** The production also used the Morning Room, which is the main bar in the Club, the foyer area and the staircase.

**How much set dressing took place at the venue? Did it look radically different or do you think it will still be easily recognisable when you watch the film?**

**AS:** The majority of the furniture in the morning room bar was swapped out to transform the space into a restaurant setting. However, the room is certainly still recognisable, due to our unique, ornate, gold wallpaper, and beautiful curtains.



**AL:** The architectural features of the building helped to inform the overall design of the set, despite the Club predating the 1950s by a significant margin. (The Club was founded all the way back in 1824). The production design and location complement each other perfectly on screen. Seamlessly bringing the audience into the characters world, without ever distracting from the dialogue or the performances taking place.

**Was this one of the key reasons you chose to shoot at The Athenæum? What else would you say makes it a great location for a project of this size and scale?**

**AL:** The Club was one of few locations that we felt could successfully double for the original look and feel of Fortnum & Mason department store, and was an early find for the production. I would say the architectural style of the building, and overall aesthetic made it an immediate first choice. And of course the film-friendly nature of the Club is also a massive draw as a Location Manager.

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When shooting a period film in central London, it makes life that little bit easier when you have an experienced, friendly, and welcoming location and site manager to work with. Avril was always on call to talk through any concerns, and she and the team were on hand

throughout shooting, to address last minute changes, questions and alterations. Which of course within film production, you can never escape entirely! The diversity of the buildings features is also wonderful for shooting multiple scenes within one location, although I'm sure Avril can tell

(The Morning Room at The Athenæum)  
you in more than me about the details of the different rooms and libraries. The Club is also large enough to hold a very big crew, along with a large number of supporting actors.

**AS:** As Angus mentions, the beauty of the Club is that we are a location that has many more locations within it, all ideal for filming, as well as recreational use for crew. The Club's Library is considered by many as the finest club library in London, with about 60,000 volumes it is also the largest. The collection was started in 1824, and has now spread across several rooms and libraries within the building.

The Club can be booked out exclusively, with the exception of a couple of Members rooms.

**AS:** Overall we are extremely accommodating as a location, and I always ensure that I work very closely with the location department to ensure all parties are happy. Having worked at the Club for 21 years, I know precisely what is involved in arranging a days' filming. The Club is a stunning building, which is steeped in history, and think that can always be felt in anything that films with us.

**Angus, what was the receiving process like for *Living* as a whole? How many of your locations were you able to find within London?**

**AL:** As I came onto the project to supervise during the first week of principal photography, I was not involved in the initial prep and research part of the shoot. However due to a number of reasons, we needed to replace about 60% of the locations after principal shooting had started, which of course presented quite a unique challenge! My process then was to speak to as many experienced colleagues and scouts working within the period genre, in order to find suggestions and introductions for workable locations that we could turn around in a very short

timeframe. Of the overall locations, we shot more than half the film in central London, with only a few days outside the M25.

**How important was it to create a clear sense of place within *Living*? Would you say London as a city plays an important role within the film?**

**AL:** It was extremely important. As you can see just from the opening sequence of the film, we are set in Central London around County Hall, the old headquarters for London City Council and Greater London Councils. London is definitely

one of the film's main characters, and we wanted to show how its architecture and overall beauty was as true then as it is now. Our Director of Photography, Director and camera team captured the locations and city beautifully. Using the locations to bring the audience back in time, to feel what it would have been like to live and work in 1950s London.

**How important is it in creating a sense of place, atmosphere and authenticity, to use real locations? Do you think you could find a location quite like The Athenæum anywhere else?**

(Image courtesy of Lionsgate)



**AL:** I feel that audiences appreciate a film shot on location in a different way to one that is heavily post-produced. Of course there were elements of post-production VFX in our film, however the creative goal was to use this as little as possible, and make an authentic film where the locations played as much of a role as the actors. London is a wonderful city as its very nature bring a sense of place, and atmosphere, we just had to find the authenticity for the period, and in some cases, step the location back in time.

The Athenæum is a location that brings all of these elements together and is a popular location for this reason.

**How was your overall experience working together on *Living*?**

**AS:** There will always be last minute changes to be made, but to be honest both parties were so professional that these were dealt with as swiftly as can be.

**AL:** Shooting at The Athenæum was a pleasure, they are one of the most pleasant locations to work with and seemed to always be open to working out problems and concerns within their scope. Logistically they made life easy as we were able to utilise the members' dining



(Image courtesy of Lionsgate)

room for crew catering, exterior covered spaces for breakout areas and supporting artists' holding. A truly enjoyable location to work with and film.

**What about the rest of the shoot? Were there any particular challenges that you and your team had to overcome or 'problem-solve' around or any particular highlights?**

**AL:** *Living* was a challenging film to complete from a location management perspective, mainly as I was brought onto the project during the first week of filming. I started two days into principal

photography to be exact. We were a new team, which meant we were playing catch-up for a great deal of the shoot. Our major story location, the playground, was taken over by developers and dug up a week before prep was scheduled to start on the site. Which presented an additional last minute challenge!

I want to praise the team that I was part of on the project, as they worked incredibly hard to bring this together, and showed great skill, willing and sense of humour.

It was a true pleasure to work with them. It is a wonderful experience to at long last see the final product, and that the effort was well worth it for the result on screen.

**Avril, as a venue are you keen to host more productions of this size in the future? Perhaps you already have some filming projects lined up?**

Of course, we always welcome filming enquiries and can't wait to see what we have visiting us at the Club next!

Thank you to both Angus and Avril for chatting with us!

*Living* is in cinemas now, you can view the trailer [here](#).

You can find out more about The Athenæum [here](#).

**Interview by Winona Navin-Holder**

