

The Kneale Experiment

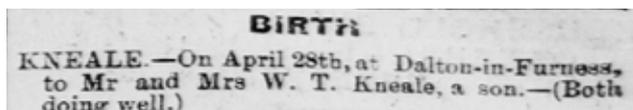
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Nigel (Tom) Kneale - 1922 to 2006 was the Island's most successful radio, television and film scriptwriter. He is best known for writing the screenplays for the cult BBC TV science fiction Quatermass series of the 1950s and subsequent feature films.

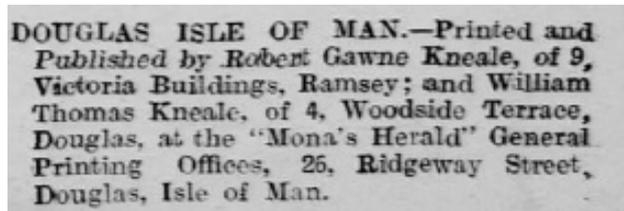
Nigel Kneale publicity photo from the 1950s. Photographer: Oswald Jones (ARCHIVE REF: PG13645)

He was born, Thomas Nigel Kneale, in 1922 in Dalton in Furness, near Barrow, Lancashire, where his father, William Thomas Kneale, was a journalist.



Mona's Herald, 3 May 1922 p8

In 1928 the family returned to their Manx homeland and by 1931 his father had joined his brother to run one of the Island's principal newspapers of the time, the *Mona's Herald*.

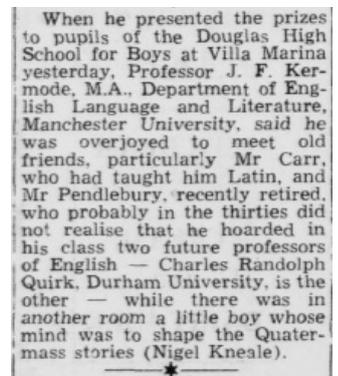


Mona's Herald, 7 Jan 1931 p8

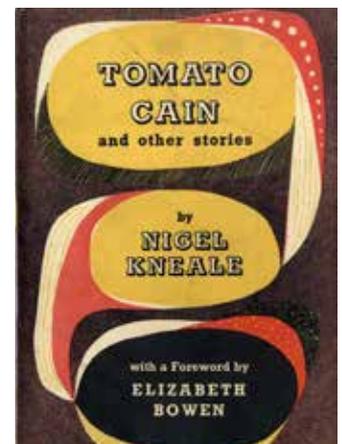
Nigel was educated at Douglas High School for Boys. Contemporaries at school were Lord Charles Randolph Quirk and Frank Kermode.

On leaving, he initially studied law with a view to practising at the bar as a Manx advocate. However, he decided that the legal profession was not for him and in 1946, at the age of 18, he broadcast live on BBC Radio, reading his own short story, *Tomato Cain*.

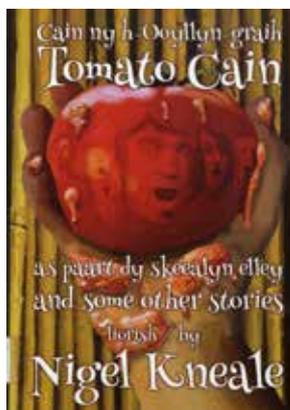
This was later published in 1949 along with others of his short stories, all reflecting aspects of rural life on the Isle of Man.



Isle of Man Times
4 Dec 1959 p6



With the support of the Isle of Man Arts Council, and commemorating the Island of Culture celebrations in 2014, a bilingual Manx Gaelic / English version of *Tomato Cain* has been recently published



Not long after his 1946 radio broadcast, Kneale left the Isle of Man for London to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). While there he continued writing and in 1950 his book of short stories won the Somerset Maugham Award - a feat repeated many years later, in 1988, by his son, Matthew. In that same year of 1950 his first professional radio script was broadcast; a drama called *The Long Stairs* based on the Snaefell mining disaster of 1897.



Isle of Man Examiner
16 June 1950 p4

Kneale's success spurred him to side-line his acting ambitions and his love of film as a medium led him to concentrate on writing for the developing television industry. In 1951 he was recruited at £250 pa as one of the first BBC TV scriptwriters. His first credited production was providing additional dialogue for Rudolph Cartier's adaptation of *Arrow to the Heart*, broadcast in 1952, leading to a long collaboration between the two.

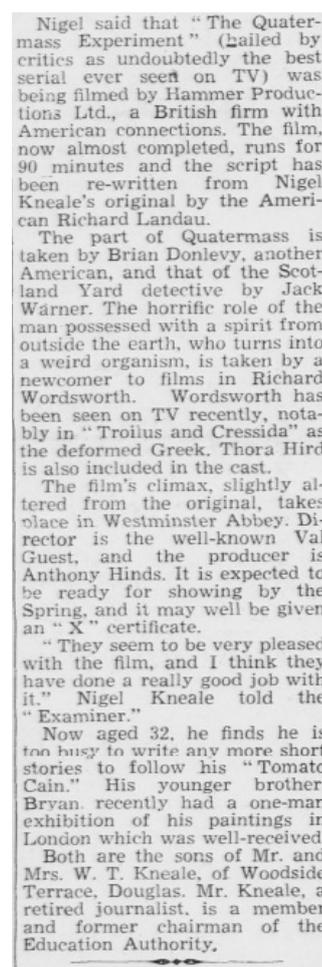
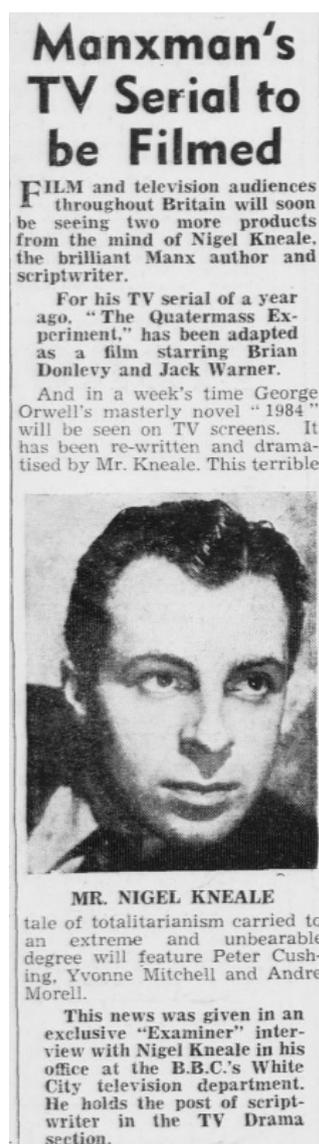
This collaboration took hold with the success of the science fiction series, *The Quatermass Experiment*, first broadcast live during the school holidays of summer 1953. Only the first two episodes were recorded and preserved by the BBC.

Next to be tackled by Kneale and Cartier was an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, followed in 1954 by the first screenplay of the science fiction classic, George Orwell's 1984, featuring in the British Film Institute's millennium year listing of the 100 greatest British television programmes of the 20th century.

In the autumn of 1955, the *Quatermass II* series was launched and at the same time Hammer Films released a feature film based on the original *Quatermass Experiment*, with Jack Warner of *Dixon of Dock Green* fame playing a Police Inspector.

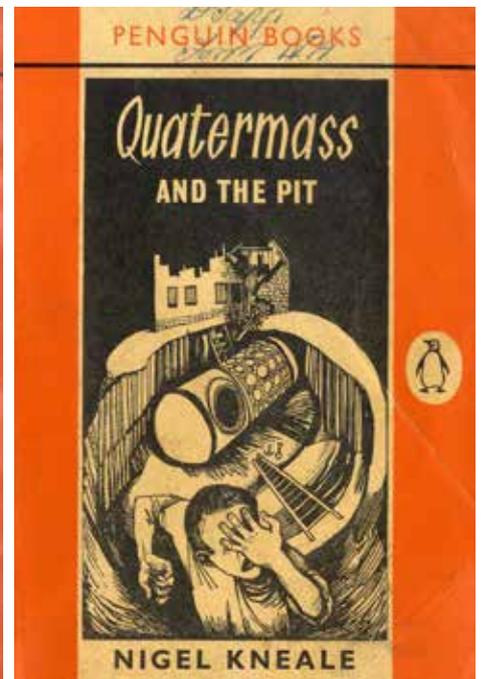
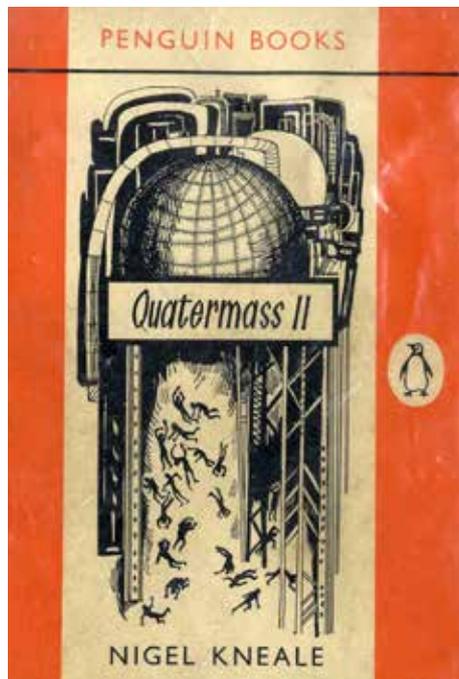
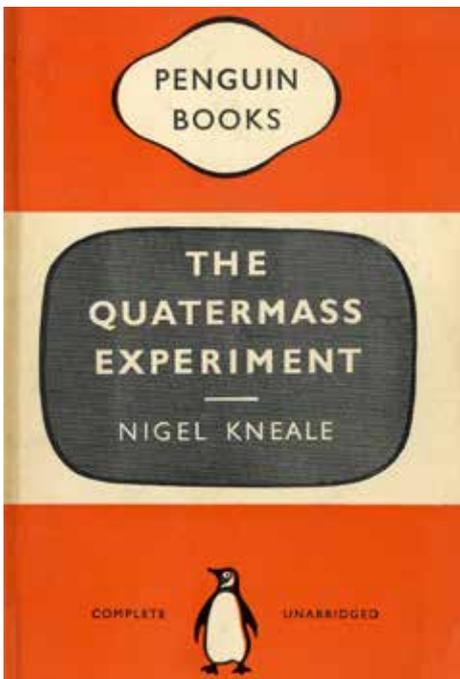
Kneale's star was now firmly in the ascendant, although his full-time contract with the BBC was to end the following year. He went on to write his first feature film screenplay for the follow-on Hammer Films production of *Quatermass II* and in 1957 was again commissioned by the BBC (on a freelance basis) to write a third *Quatermass* series, *Quatermass and the Pit*, with audience figures reaching 11 million.

His parents attended the live broadcast of the final part and the series was generally regarded as a triumph. *Quatermass and the Pit* was also later listed in the BFI's 100 greatest television programmes of the 20th century.



Isle of Man Examiner
3 Dec 1954 p6





Nigel's brother Bryan provided the book cover illustrations for *Quatermass II* and *Quatermass and the Pit*

Kneale was declared "Manxman of the Year" in 1957 and at his old school's prize-giving he was praised as a role model. On the Isle of Man, Kneale and *Quatermass* mania meant references to them were made at every opportunity.



'More like a scene from one of Nigel Kneale's *Quatermass* productions, Injebreck Reservoir as it appears to-day with the lake bed dry at the northern end'

Isle of Man Examiner, 3 Sep 1959 p1

Prior to the last *Quatermass* series, Kneale wrote a non-science fiction drama for the BBC, *Mrs Wickens in the Fall*, broadcast earlier in 1957. Also the film script for the *Abominable Snowman* starring Peter Cushing based on another TV drama on the same theme, *The Creature*.

Kneale's wife, Judith Kerr, was also employed by the BBC as a script-writer at this time, working on an adaptation of John Buchan's *Huntingtower*.

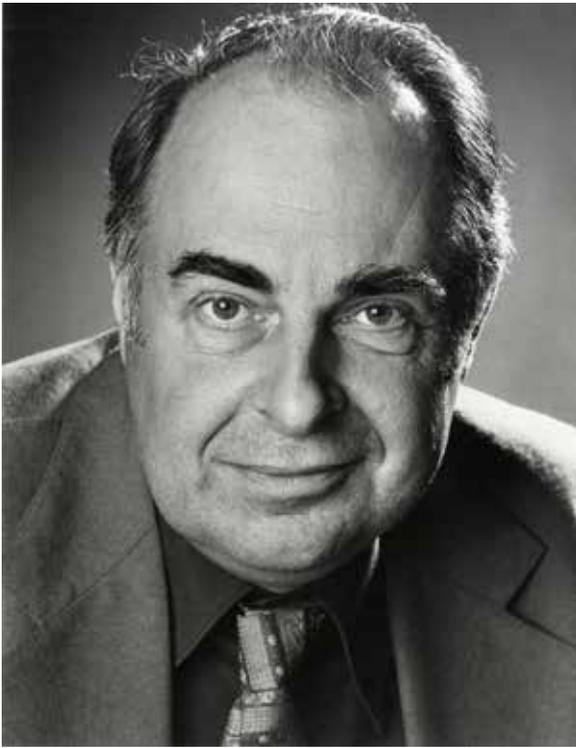
Kneale went on to work with playwright, John Osborn and director, Tony Richardson on film productions of *Look Back in Anger* (1958) and *The Entertainer* (1960), both highly commended at the time and since.

An "X" certificate is awarded to "*Look Back in Anger*" at the Picture House, Monday to Wednesday, starring Richard Burton, Claire Bloom and Mary Ure. This adaptation — which incidentally was done by Manxman Nigel ("Quatermass") Kneale — of John Osborne's play, presents the picture of not only an angry young man, but a thoroughly detestable one. The hero is an ill-mannered, brutal bore at loggerheads with life in general and with a callous disregard for his young wife. Richard Burton gives an excellent performance in the leading role.

Mr. Nigel Kneale, the well-known Manx playwright, has written the film version of John Osborne's "*The Entertainer*," starring Sir Lawrence Olivier, which cost £350,000 and will shortly be shown in the West End and throughout the world. Previously, his adaptation of the author's "*Look Back in Anger*," produced by the same British film company, proved an outstanding success. Mr. Kneale is, of course, the creator of "*Quatermass*."

In other roles, Kneale was a speaker at his old school's prize-giving in April 1960 and was one of the judges (along with Dame Flora Robson and others) of the BBC's North Region play competition in July of that year.





ARCHIVE REF: PG/13645

The 1960s was Kneale's decade, building on his already formidable reputation as an innovative screenplay writer, although he turned down the chance to write the screenplays for the early 'Bond' movies. The 60s, however, also led to some of his failures, with adaptations of *Lord of the Flies* and *Brave New World* never making it to production. 1967 saw the last of the Hammer Films' *Quatermass* productions with the release of *Quatermass and the Pit*, to critical acclaim. Also well-received was *The Year of the Sex Olympics* on the new BBC 2 channel in 1968, fore-telling more recent TV series such as *Big Brother* and *Celebrity Love Island*. Location shots were filmed on the Isle of Man.

In the 1970s Kneale wrote his only stage play, *Crow*, based on the life of the Manx slave trader, Captain Hugh Crow of Maughold. This was never produced and he eventually sold the rights as a TV script to Lew Grade's Associated Television company (ATV). Prior to the start of filming, Grade cancelled production with no explanation. Kneale continued working until 1997, his final script being for an episode of *Kavanagh, QC*, starring John Thaw.

Kneale featured in the BBC biographical documentaries, *The Late Show*, interviewed by Sarah Dunant (1990) and *The Kneale Tapes* (2003) prior to his death in 2006 at the age of 84.

Nigel (Tom) is survived by his widow, Judith Kerr, author of children's picture book classics, *The Tiger who Came to Tea*, the *Mog* series, amongst others and her autobiographical story *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*; their son Matthew, guest at Manx LitFest 2015 and author of *English Passengers*; daughter Tacy; and Tom's brother, the sculptor of the 3-legs sited at the entrance to Ronaldsway Airport, Bryan Kneale.

His personal papers are deposited with Manx National Heritage in its manuscript collection (MS 11631) together with assorted photographs - including two portraits and stills from the productions of *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1984), *Quatermass*, *Quatermass II* and *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* (PG/13645)

Film & TV Credits can be found at:

www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/458926/credits.html

For further background information online:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigel_Kneale

Online versions of television programmes and film productions at:

www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%22nigel+kneale%22

Nigel Kneale related items in the Isle of Man National Library:

- Into the Unknown The Fantastic Life of Nigel Kneale
- We are the Martians : the legacy of Nigel Kneale
- Literary papers of playwright and author Thomas Nigel Kneale including screenplays, scripts, correspondence and press reviews
- Radio playscript of 'The Long Stairs'; letter from Nigel Kneale to Mr Cuerdale regarding same
- Papers of William Thomas Kneale

