

The Angels' Share 2012
101 minutes
Director: Ken Loach

The background of *The Angels' Share*, Loach's collaboration with the leftwing Scottish lawyer turned screenwriter Paul Laverty, is the widespread, seemingly permanent youth unemployment and the despair and communal erosion it engenders. But the realistic and humanistic tone is bracingly optimistic, and it's one of the 75-year-old Loach's sprightliest films, made at an age when most directors have hung up their viewfinders, entered a period of terminal decline or settled for repeating themselves.

The movie begins with a group of criminals brought together by chance in the manner of *The Usual Suspects* and gradually moves into a heist comedy that combines two classic Scottish films, both directorial debuts from different eras, Alexander Mackendrick's *Whisky Galore!* (1949) and Bill Forsyth's *That Sinking Feeling* (1980).

The young offenders, played by non-professional actors who perform brilliantly under Loach's sympathetic direction, are introduced at Glasgow's City Court when pleading guilty to a variety of crimes. Their demeanour is playfully contrasted with the solemnity of the bewigged judge, and most of the offences are quite minor – petty theft, defacing public statues, drunkenness in a public place. However, one of the defendants, Robbie (Paul Brannigan), is up for grievous bodily harm, and he's only saved from another custodial sentence because his girlfriend is eight months pregnant.

All of them are given community service and are fortunate to come under the supervision of Harry (John Henshaw, a familiar face from TV drama and the occasional movie), a middle-aged, working-class Mancunian who forges a bond with Robbie. He's as sympathetic a figure as Colin Welland's teacher in *Kes* and Peter Mullan's soccer coach in *My Name is Joe* and brings a wealth of unpatronising understanding to his charges' lives and problems.

The unemployed Robbie, determined to go straight and be a good father, appears to have everything against him – a history of violence (there's a revealing razor scar on his left cheek) and his girlfriend's brutal father, who's determined to get him out of Glasgow and away on his own, whether by force or bribery. Harry could be his salvation.

At this point a major dramatic and thematic device appears to link the action, the humour and the ironic morality, and it's whisky. Harry is a connoisseur of fine single malt. He pours a dram to celebrate Robbie's fatherhood. He takes the group of offenders, who are doing public service, painting old community centres and cleaning cemeteries, on a tour of a distillery and then to a whisky tasting in Edinburgh. These occasions constitute a delightful documentary on scotch, its history, production and consumer appreciation. By revealing that Robbie has a natural nose for the hard stuff, it also leads to his discovery of a vocation, his return to crime and his ultimate redemption.

Venue:

Traigh Mhor, 1 Big Sand, Gairloch.

Directions: Pass Sands campsite on the left and after the cattle grid take first turning left into Big Sand. Road runs parallel to the sea and at the T junction (having passed the phone box on right), turn LEFT and follow road down and round the bad bend to the right. Up over the wee rise and down towards the sea. Our house is the third entrance on the left. We have pink gravel and a caravan in the garden and a huge No.1 by the back door. Park on gravel area or in parking space opposite gate. Walk past the garage and round to the front of the house. Come ben the hoose and coats can be hung on coat rack in corner. Cinema is up the stairs to the right! DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR FOLDUP CHAIR.