It's wearily common to describe people in the film industry as 'enigmatic', but in Harry Rasky's case, this actually seemed to be true. Previous journalists researching him since his death in 2007 despaired over how rarely his name rang any bells. His plethora of awards and slew of big-name film subjects, from Marc Chagall to Leonard Cohen, meant his posthumous paper trail was considerable. Yet most of his films are locked away in archives, and outside of Canada, no-one seems to have heard of him.

In an era when documentary-makers are often chasing bleak, issue-based topics, journalist Ashley Petkovski theorised that Rasky's style had gone out of fashion. Optimism and affection for the subject matter were at the heart of his films. Such a celebratory tone seems at odds with modern directors. It's a far cry from the crusading zeal of Nick Broomfield or the critical watchfulness of Louis Theroux.

This is certainly evident in *Hall of Kings*. In his autobiography, *Nobody Swings on Sundays*, Rasky called himself 'an evangelist'. Within moments of entering the building he was captivated: 'I moved from tomb to tomb', he later wrote, 'encountering almost everyone I had ever heard about or been influenced by (Hello, Chaucer! How are you, Milton?)'.

The filming went smoothly. The director writes warmly of a scene in which Lynn Redgrave sits in the sacrarium and recites Queen Victoria's account of her own coronation there in 1837. In another scene Siobhan McKenna, as Mary Queen of Scots, reproaches Elizabeth I at her tomb. It was here that Rasky, according to Petkovski, developed his uniquely reverential style. The Abbey was his training ground.

Dr Tony Trowles, Head of the Abbey Collection, first came across a chance reference to the film online over a decade ago and had tried to track down a copy ever since, contacting the Television Academy (home of the Emmys), the BFI, York University in Ontario, and even a cinema in Florida who had apparently shown the film during a Rasky season some years ago but who didn't reply.

Part of my own research for this piece involved liaising with the US-based organisations Missing Movies and the International Documentary Association (IDA), who have done groundbreaking work on finding and preserving lost films. I soon realised that the reasons films go walkabout are numerous. Grant Manager for the IDA, Melissa D'Lando, listed rights issues, film lab closures, nebulous tax loopholes, obsolete media, restoration challenges, censorship and limited broadcast rights as major reasons. Unsurprisingly, optimism was thin on the ground. James Mason scholars knew little about the film, and McKenna's papers at Galway University contained no file about her involvement.

An archivist at York found an empty space where a copy of *Hall of Kings* had been removed in 2003 for 'conservation'. D'Lando had even reached out to that same small independent cinema in Florida where the film was apparently last screened (also in 2003) with Rasky present. They confirmed there was no copy on site.

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Then the archivist casually mentioned that Harry's widow, Arlene Rasky, had donated items from his personal archive to the University of Toronto. I got in touch, and they quickly confirmed that a streaming link was available. A physical copy of it could even be obtained once we had copyright. That's a kafkaesque process in itself, but we're working on it.

Our fears about the film having fallen prey to neglect or obsolescence were unfounded. It was never really lost; it just wasn't found, until now.

Watching the film is an archaic, but almost Biblical experience (which is fitting, given that Mason once narrated the Bible for the BBC). The actor's opening words make references to 'freedom', 'faith', and 'indomitable spirits' as the camera moves between the quire, the rose window and the west towers. It's quite something to behold.

Why did a film that boasted the involvement of Mason, Redgrave and McKenna, who all had distinguished careers, not become a classic? The chatter among Rasky's contemporaries ran high. The cache of correspondence from York University's archives showed that Orson Welles enjoyed the script (even if an administrative error meant he never came on board), while Laurence Olivier reluctantly turned Rasky down due to diary constraints. Rasky ultimately won the award he predicted would come his way. Yet *Hall of Kings* seems never to have reached UK screens.

It may be some time before we can let the world see the film the way they can Alan Bennett's excellent BBC Abbey documentary from the 1990s. In the meantime, all we can say is watch this space. Soon *Hall of Kings* may be showing somewhere very near you.

With great thanks to Dr Tony Trowles, Melissa D'Lando, Dennis Doro from Missing Movies, York University in Ontario and the University of Toronto.