BRITISH COMEDIES OF THE MID-1930'S - "BULLDOG JACK" AND "NO LIMIT"

British films of the mid-1930's were generally unappetizing. The "big" films, the epics of Empire-building ("Rhodes of Africa") and the adaptations of London hit plays, were usually pretentious boreks. At the other end of the scale, the quickies were quite unspeakably bad. Sandwiched in between were the few good British films being made at that time - not "good" in a spectacular or even markedly cinematic sense, but in the essentially British and satisfying entertainment they offered. Such films were the charming "Mr. Cohen Takes a Waka" ("The Turn of the Tide" - a film similar to, and much superior to, Fleaherty's "Man of Aran" - and there were the comedies. Musical comedies from Gracie Fields and Jingles Mathews; pleasant bits of foecery like "Not so Dusty"; the regional humour of Sydney Howard and Sandy Powell; and, especially the comedies of Will Hay, Jack Hulbert and George Formby. Hay's best is "Windbag the Sailor" (directed by American William Beaudine) and "Oh Mr. Porter" were exceptionally good; we hope we can discover prints of these for a later showing. These comedies were not big - but they were big money-makers, as eagerly awaited as the new Shirley Temple vehicle. And while not expensive in budget, they weren't quickies either - their stars never appeared in more than one or two vehicles a year, and thus they managed to avoid the mass-production stamp.

Our two comedies tonight, if not the best of Hulbert and Formby, are certainly reliable guides to their work. As a child of six, both films delighted me in 1938 - and memories of them remain very vivid during the following two decades. Seeing them again today, for the first time since their original release, it is pleasing to find that "Bulldog Jack", at least, is still a darned good little picture. Mr. Formby has dated rather more, but it is easy to see why the exciting race climax would so excite a youngster - especially in a year when horror films were beginning to disappear, and one needed some form of cinematic excitement to take their place!

"BULLDOG JACK" (Gaumont-British, 1935) Directed by Walter Forde; screenplay by Sidney Gilliat, I.O.C. Orton and Gerald Fairlie, in association with "Sapper" - basic idea and dialogue by Jack Hulbert; Photography - M. Greenbaum; art director - Alfred Junge; musical director - Louis Levy; edited by Otto Ludwig

The Cast: Jack Pennington (JACK HULBERT); Ann Manders (Fay Wray) Morello (Ralph Richardson); Algy (Claude Hulbert); Denny (Gibb McLaughlin); Bulldog Drummond (Atholl Fleming); Salvini (Paul Graetz)

Jack Hulbert was a comic very much in the Jack Buchanan mould, an excellent tap dancer and singer of breezy ditties. In this film however, the musical element was completely ignored in favor of a pleasing satire on the popular Drummond mysteries - a satire that manages to be a rattling good little thriller in its own right. British comedies had a happy knack of combining humour with seriously presented action - and the climactic underground chase of this film is a particularly good example. Ralph Richardson, playing the villain, had, incidentally, played Drummond in a straight take only the year previous to this! The film is a polished job, with a snappy musical score, but features one movie boner; the allegedly deserted subway station, abandoned for years, boasts a poster for London's Dominion theatre - advertising a 1935 movie, "Here Comes the Navy!"


Produced by Associated Talking Pic Ltd, forerunner of Failing Studios, "No Limit" lacks the polish of "Bulldog Jack", and is somewhat slower-paced, but it remains good fun none-the-less. However, it may be a trifle difficult for the American members of our audience to follow: a rather harsh sound-track, coupled with the Lancashire dialects, demands close attention to the dialogue. When we pre-screened this film to three members last week, all of them missed one of Formby's best - and bluest - gags! However, even if you don't understand it all, you'll enjoy the delightfully old-hat and sentimental songs, and the really exciting and supremely well-staged TT race climax, both funny and thrilling, in the best old Sennett tradition. By the way, Peter Gawthorne - playing Florence Desmond's boss - was Britain's own Margaret Dumont, the perennial foil of all English comedians.

Wm. K. Everson