PLEASE NOTE: a slight alteration to tonight's program. The one-reel version of "Isle of Lost Ships" suddenly proved to be unavailable tonight, and thus we have had to substitute another one-reeler from the same series -- in this case, a particularly good Rin Tin Tin subject. "Isle of Lost Ships" will thus be added to one of our two April programs. We apologise for failing to deliver exactly as promised, but film society programming is often a very hazardous business, and compared with other societies, we haven't done too badly in this particular respect. I think that this is only the second or third time in our eight-year years of operations that we have thus fallen down; so please bear with us. By way of compensation, we're adding some very interesting "bonus" material to tonight's program, which will not be listed in these notes, but which we'll announce before the show starts.

THE TREASURE THAT WAS LOST (MGM, 1944) Dir: Sammy Lee; one reel. This enjoyable short from MGM's "Passing Parade" series emerges as a somewhat ingenious but sincerely motivated tribute to the Museum of Modern Art, and its work in film preservation. The facts of film deterioration are somewhat simplified, and it's a little ludicrous to see a projectionist tugging at a film and ripping it apart, and explaining that it's just falling to pieces in his hands. On second thought, considering the calibre of 90% of today's projectionists, maybe it isn't so ludicrous either. And of course, the idea of duping the film is apparently quite beyond the ken of the projectionist in question. However, these are picayune points which will doubtless amuse anyone who knows film, but really cannot be held against the picture itself -- any more than can the shot of an enormous check being made out to the Museum, followed by footage that that check has allegedly preserved -- mainly old Russian newsreel shots that must be in EVERYBODY'S collection!

COUNTY HOSPITAL (MGM, Hal Roach, 1932) Dir: James Parrott; with Laurel and Hardy, Billy Gilbert. We had an awkward choice to make with this film; whether to play a 2-reel version that was in pretty shocking condition, or a condensed version that was generally in good shape. We finally settled on the latter, principally because it's a good condensation, but also of course because it's so much easier to watch. The footage deleted from this version consists of trims from episodes that are still well represented; most of the deletions came (wisely) from the climactic car ride, which is an unfunny sequence anyway due to its use of the most obvious back projection. The best of the film remains, and while it is not top-notch Laurel and Hardy, it still has some very funny stuff -- particularly in the early scenes as Stan visits Ollie in hospital, bringing him some hard-boiled eggs and nuts to cheer him up!

A BIT OF THE BEST (Warner, 1955) One-reel; written and produced by Robert Youngson; adapted from the 1927 feature "Tracked By the Police", directed by Ray Enright, and starring Rin Tin Tin, Jason Robards, Virginia Brown Faire, Tom Santschi and Nanette.

Robert Youngson's series of condensations of silent features was one of the bright spots of the short-subjects field in the fifties, and it's a pity that in this one he fell into the trap that the others in his series generally so carefully avoided -- that of being facetious about and condescending towards the film. The fact that the film was only a bread and butter item in its day doesn't lessen the disappointment in the over-written and over-gagged narration. But otherwise, this short is first-class, beautifully edited to contain most of the highlights of one of Rinty's best pictures. And the pictorial quality from the old negative is just stunning. The picture is jam-packed with exciting melodramatic
action, and some real trouping from Rinty. The title, "Tracked by the Police", had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the film by the way; there wasn't a single policeman in all of its six reels.

- Intermission -

"SANDERS OF THE RIVER" (Alexander Korda-London Films, 1935); 10 reels; directed by Zoltan Korda; adapted from Edgar Wallace's stories by Lejos Hilo and Jeffrey Dell; musical score by Mischa Spolianski; lyrics by Arthur Wermer; photographed by Georges Perinal, Osmond Borrodaile and Louis Page; edited by Charles Grichton; starring PAUL ROBESON and LESLIE BANKS, with Nina Mae McKinney, Robert Cochrane, Martin Walker and Allan Jeayes.

We've had frequent requests for this well-remembered picture, but this is the first print we've run across in recent years. And it was well worth the wait, since it is a particularly fine print, and quite complete. Seeing it again today is easy, however, to realise why it disappeared so quickly from television. The Paul Robeson angle was a principal factor of course. And with the African political climate what it now is, together with touchy racial issues in this country, the film might well present TV stations with ticklish problems. How quickly political tempos - and tempers - change! Certainly this film, with its friendly but decidedly condescending attitude towards the African Negro, would never have been made in quite this fashion today.

Like all the Korda films of the middle and late thirties, it is expertly made, full of solid production values and excellent photography. It dates hardly at all in a technical sense; even the back-projection, sparingly used, is far more convincing than most such of that period. Like so many British films of this type, it never quite makes the most of its action sequences - but it boils along at a good clip, and enough is happening to make it consistently interesting. The location work in Africa is so well blended with footage shot in England that, the few studio scenes apart, it is often difficult to tell which is England and which not. The shots of the river boat steaming into the African community at the end, for example, were all taken just a few miles outside London.

On the whole, "Sanders" is one of the best of the several British-made African adventures of the 30's. "Rhodes of Africa" was a big, but extremely stodgy film. "King Solomon's Mines" was fine stuff, with a really rousing climax, but as I recall it (and it has been some 15 years since I last saw it) it was marred by too much obvious studio footage. Certainly "Sanders" has some of the best authentic footage since "Trader Horn", with standouts being the lovely shots of the canoes skimming along the river, and the beautifully photographed sequence of the aerial flight, with the various small animal stampedes that it causes. Many of these shots may be familiar to you through their use as stock footage in "B" pictures like "Drums of the Congo".

Next program -- Monday next - "THE STORM" (1922) with House Peters, Virginia Valli; D.W. Griffith's "Greed" (Lionel Barrymore, Harry Carey) and "FISHER FOLK" (Wilfrid Lucas, Jeannie McPherson); and Larry Semon and Dorothy Dwan with Oliver Hardy and Jim Jeffries in "KID SPEED".

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