Wednesday: Monday Dec. 6th: "MISS BLUEBEARD" (1925, dir: Frank Tuttle) with Bebe Daniels, Robert Fraser, Raymond Griffith; and "BLACK CELULONE" (1925) with Rex the Wonder Horse; one of the best of Hal Roach's outdoor action features.

Monday December 15th: A program for our schoolboys-at-heart: Stevenson's "TREASURE ISLAND" (1934, dir: Victor Fleming) with Beery, Cooper, Barrymore, Stone; Coward’s "THE COUNTRY BEYOND" (1936, dir: Eugene Forde) with Rochelle Hudson.

December 1 1969

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

A George Pearson Program

George Pearson was far too important and prolific a director for an appraisal to be attempted within the limited confines of these notes. Perhaps the major British director between 1915 and 1920 - and by any standards, one of them - his films ranged from the famous "Ultus" serials, British equivalents of the Feuillard films, to, later in the 20's, the best Betty Balfour vehicles, films that paralleled the American Mary Pickford specials. We hope that many of you have been able to read his autobiography - "Flashback" - in the intervening weeks since we announced tonight's program. It's a fascinating, detailed, and genuinely modest book, covering his career from his early nautical days, through his big commercial period of the twenties, his association with James Whale on "Journey's End", his documentary work and his ultimate return to teaching. A gentleman of the old school, Pearson seems to have been a filmic equivalent of Mr. Chips. Far too few (none in this country) of his best silents are available today, and obviously it would be unfair to even suggest that you judge his work from tonight's films. That would be tantamount to judging Herbert Brenon through a viewing of "Silver Sands" and "The Dominant Sex" with no knowledge of "Peter Pan", "Beau Geste" or "A Daughter of the Gods". Certainly both of tonight's films are from one of his least inspiring periods. Nevertheless, while economical independent films, they are by no means quickies - they're neat little films, simple, full of good story-telling, and typical of the flavor, if not of the scope, of many of his silents.

"OPEN ALL NIGHT" (Ambassador, 1929) Director: George Pearson; Camera: Ernest Palmer; 6 reels (This print bears a phony US tv title of "Muder by Appointment" with Frank Vosper, Gillian Lind, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Leslie Howard, Michael Sherry, Lewis Shaw, Margaret Vines, Colin Keith-Johnson, Percy Walsh, Victor Stanley, Mark Daly, Gordon Begg, Ellis Irving, Lyn Vivian, John Singer.

An enjoyable little pot-pourri of romantic, dramatic and melodramatic plot-lines, "Open All Night" is a fairly obvious plagiarism from "Grand Hotel" with Frank Vosper in an enlarged equivalent of the Jean Hersholt role, and Geraldine Fitzgerald doing her (then) not too adequate best to copy Joan Crawford. It even rather defiantly flaunts its periphery by having one of the characters remark, in the world-weary tones of Lewis Stone, that "Nothing ever happens at the Paragon Hotel." Apart from its unpretentious entertainment values, it's particularly interesting in giving us Frank Vosper in a major role. An excellent and curious actor, Vosper was also a stage player and a writer and director. He co-wrote "Love From a Stranger", and played the lead on the London stage. His career came to a tragic and mysterious end and when he disappeared aboard ship, and his death - whether accident, suicide or murder - has never been explained.

"ONCE A THIEF" (Ambassador, 1935) Directed by George Pearson; Scenario by Basil Mason (from a story by Robert William Dargaville); Camera: Francis King; 7 reels With John Stuart, Nancy Burne, Derek Gorst, Frederik Colley, Lewis Shaw, Lola Duncan, Joan Kepp Walsh, Ronald Shiner.

Since Lewis Shaw - Britain's own Jimmy Eagles - plays identically in both films, I suppose it could be considered as much of a Shaw Festival as a Pearson program. "Once a Thief" is the better of the two films, though also the more old-fashioned and typical of the novellistish fare that was so popular in British silents. But it has a certain timeliness and conviction and isn't always as predictable as it seems it should be. John Stuart (still active in bit roles) should have been one of the major male stars of the British cinema of the 30's - especially with so little real competition - but unfortunately he was exposed far too quickly and extensively in lesser films. Had he stuck to the more important films such as "The Lost Chord", "Abdul the Damned" and Hitchcock's "Number 17" he might well have become a "prestige" name; but too many 'little' films like "Once a Thief" prevented his ever reaching major status.

--- Wm. K. Everson ---