Monday next, June 29th: "STATE FAIR" (1933, dir: Henry King) with Will Rogers, Janet Gaynor, the full 8-reel print; preceded by "THE THIRD ALARM" (1930, dir: Erich Johnson) with Anita Louise, James Hall, Jean Hersholt; two wartime army training cartoons from Warner Bros., and a repeat of the 1930 D.W. Griffith interview.

June 22, 1970

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

"SPARE A COPPER" (ATP-Ealing Studios, 1940) Directed by John Paddy Carstairs. Produced by Michael Balcon; Associate Produced by Basil Dearden; Story by Basil Dearden, Austin Melford, Roger MacDougall; Special Effects by Roy Kellino and Douglas Woolsey; Camera, Bryan Langley; music, Louis Levy & Rls With George Forbury, Dorothy Hyson, Bernard Lee, John Warwick, Warburton Gamble, John Turnbull, George Merritt, Eileen Mackayen, James Woodburn, Ronald Shiner, Tom Hewurst, Johnny Schofield.

Made at the very height of Forbury's career, when his pictures had really good production mountings and were big boxoffice, "Spare A Copper" (a particularly neat pun title incidentally) was a huge success, but Forbury showing. It was released in the Summer months on a double-bill with a RKO western, "Yukon Flight", making it an ideal children's program - and one just couldn't turn around without coming across that program. (I remember cycling some 20 miles one Saturday in the forlorn hope of digging up something old at out of the way theatres - and wound up with this program again, even though it was playing at my own local cinema!) The critics however were unduly harsh towards it, pointing out that it was essentially well made through all of its old lines again. At the time, Forbury aficionados felt this was a somewhat undervalued film - and likewise when, a year later, the critics felt that "It's Turned Out Nice Again" (Perri, Perri, Perri) story, little slapstick was one of his best, the public disagreed and it didn't duplicate the boxoffice record of "Spare a Copper". However, for once the critics were right! Hitchcock, in "Saboteur", can get away with a film that is a rehash of earlier works; a limited comedic like Forbury doesn't find it so easy. "Spare a Copper" is fun and thoroughly entertaining; it is constantly on the move and filled with lively slapstick chases and knockabout, and some typical songs. But it remained in naive inspiration, and for every routine that Forbury goes through, one can recall a similar routine that he did better in an earlier film. However, in this country, where the bulk of Forbury's work is not so well known, this liability hardly exists, and the film can still stand on its own as a brisk and very entertaining comedy. Not the least of its delights are a typically illogical British newspaper headline announcing "SECRET LAUNCHING TODAY" - and the charm and grace of its leading lady, Dorothy Hyson, although she is not too well served here by some unflattering lighting. "It's Turned Out Nice Again", which followed (and which we are showing on August 16th) is a better comedy however, and also marked the end of his association with Ealing; thereafter his comedies were made (until 1946) for Columbia, and their standards dropped quite considerably.


Although produced by Geinshorn, Hay's old alma mater, "Where's that Fire?" (and another comedy, "Rey Rey Ua!" were made for 20th Century Fox release. After these two films, which were not markedly successful, Hay moved over to Ealing as a replacement for George Forbury. But without his perennial sidkicks (Graham Hoffart and Moore Marriott) his comedies there were variable, and were never able to reproduce his previous successful formulas. "Where's that Fire?" immediately followed one of Hay's best and most successful films "Jam on the Roof", in which the trio of comedians played mildly corrupt policemen involved with smugglers. The attempt to duplicate that film, by casting them here as inept firemen, up against thieves, is a little too obvious - although again, it will be less obvious to U.S. audiences. To my knowledge, "Where's that Fire?" was never released in this country either theatrically or on tv, and it survives three decades rather well. One sequence involving the hoisting of a pole is a classic of slapstick chaos almost up to Laurel & Hardy standards, and there is a good deal of efficient slapstick and some amusing byplay involving a phoney bank. The film comedy, set in the mid-30's and early 40's, one automatically found that the villains, even of the pettiest kind, were clearly (by accent and Hollywood-inspired behaviour, if not by direct statement) Americans. This was not so much a racial slur as a direct tribute to American superiority in criminal efficiency, and an admission that no British crook could be convincing enough to provide the necessary opposition to the heroes. (This applied as much to straight thrillers like "Non-Stop New York" and "Watch Cat" with Margaret Rutherford and Finlay Currie as New York "com artists!" as it did to comedies). "Where's that Fire?" is not up to the top Hay standards ("Oh Mr. Porter" "Ask a Policeman") but it is certainly one of his better films, and a much livelier and more inventive comedy than many of us thought back in 1939.