Next program: January 31st: LA CRISE EST FINIE (1934, dir: Robert Siodmak) with Danielle Darrieux and Albert Préjean; a French "42nd Street", unsubtitled, but synopsis provided; followed by MACAO, L'ENFER DU JEU (1939, dir: Jean Delannoy) with Erich von Stroheim, Sessue Hayakawa; edited, dubbed version, but all that is now available; a lavish von Sternbergian melodrama.

The Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

December 13, 1976

YOUR UNCLE DUDLEY (20th Century Fox, 1935) Directed by Eugene Forde; Screenplay by Allan Rivkin, Dore Schary and Joseph Hoffman from a play by Howard Lindsay and Bertrand Robinson; Camera, Harry Jackson; 7 reels


"Your Uncle Dudley" has been waiting in the Huffian wings for some ten years, rather like Ruby Keeler waiting for Bebe Daniels to break her leg in "42nd Street" - and tonight, with the sudden re-shuffling of our program in order to screen "Gangway", it gets its big chance! It'll go out there as a "B" picture and come back as a "B" picture, but at least it will have had its cutting. Oddly enough, and for no apparent reason, it's a film I had seen and remembered very fondly as a child, though there seems little in it to gain its attention over Laurel & Hardy. Somehow the soft, amiable father figures of the 30's - Horton, and more especially Charlie Ruggles - seemed to attract even when the films themselves had little to appeal to the juvenile mind. (Or perhaps it is just that my own father was, and still is, a little like Laughlin in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street".) The New York Times rather unfairly chastises the film as being "aggressively commonplace", and it's certainly not especially memorable. But it is civilized, pleasant and full of solid personalities; it's always good, for example, to see Lois Wilson in a leading role in this period. Usually she was limited to bits in quickies like "Laughing at Life", or would find herself cast as Shirley Temple's mother, and thus doomed to be squashed flat by a bus in the first reel or so.

GANGWAY (Gaumont-British, 1937) Directed by Sonnie Hale; screenplay by Lester Samuels and Sonnie Hale from an original story by Dwight Taylor; Camera, Glenn MacWilliams; Art Director, Alfred Junge; 8 reels

With Jessie Matthews, Barry Mackay, Nat Pendleton, Noel Madison, Alastair Sim, Olive Blakeney, Liana Orsens, Patrick Ludlow, Doris Rogers, Laurence Anderson, Danny Green, Edmon Ryan, Blake Dorn, Graham Moffatt, Peter Gawthorne, James Graven, Harry Ballatt, Warren Jenkins, Michael Rennie and Sonnie Hale (unbilled bit as stereotyped Britisher at the bar).

There have been two recent books on Jessie Matthews (one, her autobiography) plus a career article in last December's "Films in Review", to which we can refer you for more details on the Matthews personality and career. "Gangway" was probably the weakest of her major starring vehicles for Gaumont - I say "probably" because I haven't seen "Head Over Heels" in recent years - but it came while she was still at peak popularity, and was a solid hit. She was the one British star who really meant something at American boxoffices, and "Gangway" is clearly an attempt to consolidate that popularity with an America-oriented plot. While the story kids both American gangsterism and American movies, it also seems to take them fairly seriously. The interpolation of Hollywood gangster footage into a casual saloon disagreement is nothing short of hilarious. The film certainly went down well at the time, helped no little by the popularity of the title song - one couldn't escape it in Britain - and by one of the most attractive and showmanlike coming attractions trailers that Britain ever turned out. Matthews and her husband, Sonnie Hale, were having problems while the film was being made however, and it shows. Hale seems to be almost deliberately making Jessie look as dowdy and dumpy as possible; her clothes and makeup are all wrong, and even that same cameraman Glenn MacWilliams (who did her "Evergreen") can't do much to remedy these drawbacks. Hale was never a Victor Saville alias - but in fairness, he did do much better by her - and by the film itself - in her next, "Sailing Alone". Tonight's print leaves a good deal to be desired, but we never look a gift horse in the mouth - and Alastair Sim is a delight!