Next program April 24th: A three-hour pot-pourri of silent shorts—all new to the Huff, with the exception of two reprints from approx. 20 years ago: SUNDOWN LIMITED, one of the best Our Gangs; LOOKING FOR SALLY, a first-rate Charley Chase; episodes from early serials, THE VENTURES OF MARGUERITE and THE WOMAN IN GREY; THOMAS INCE STUDIO, a two-reel coverage, TWO MASTERS, a fascinating dramatic 2-reeler with Guy Bates Post and Mary Eaton; THE HOUSE THAT DIMITRI BUILT, a British combination of animation and live action; REUNION, a superb Out of the Inkwell; PARIS UNDERWORLD, a remarkable French primitive, A SEA DOG'S TALE, a wild, surrealistic Sennett with Billy Bevan.

Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society

THE ROYAL BED (Rko, 1930) Directed by Lowell Sherman
Produced by William Le Baron; Screenplay by J. Walter Ruben from the play "The Queen's Husband" by Robert E. Sherwood, Camera, Leo Tover; Associate Producer, Henry Hobart; Assistant Director, Harmon Weight; 7 reels

With a Sherwood play as foundation, Lowell Sherman's elegance as both director and actor, and the cool beauty of Mary Astor, "The Royal Bed" has enough going for it to lift it above the general run of rather stodgy stage adaptations that seemed to characterise most Rko product of 1929/30. It's a handsome film too, with elaborate sets and crowd scenes, and some well utilised glass shots and other photographic tricks. But there's no denying that it would have been a better film either if Lubitsch had made it, or if Rko had waited a couple of years until they as a studio were out of that awkward transition-to-sound stage. Nevertheless, it's relatively brief, and Sherman's work on both sides of the camera always makes it a pleasure to watch. If Louis XI really uttered the quote he is given in the main titles, then he seems to have contributed a Lubitsch touch of his own to French court life!

One shot - or sequence - is especially worth noting, that of the beginning of the court ball. It is an exact blueprint for the similar sequence in the 1937 "The Prisoner of Zenda" - same tight opening, same pullback shot, same use of a glass establishing shot to give the illusion of size. Obviously Selsnick remembered this sequence from his years at Rko, and when he did "Zenda", had the design of the sequence followed to the letter, embellished of course by added size and spectacle, but using a glass-shot in exactly the same way to implant the illusion of even greater space in the audience's mind.

John Coehle has suggested that stills indicate that Francis X. Bushman might be in this film, since a Bushman look-alike can be spotted on some stills. I have a vague recollection that when I first ran the film, somebody of Bushman's stature caught my eye in brief shots. It would be entirely consistent with Sherman's character to give Bushman at a down period in his career, either a good-sized role (which wound up being cut) or to have used him as an extra. Unfortunately I have had no time to re-examine the film, so Bushman's presence or otherwise can be a joint investigative procedure this evening.

LORNA DOONE (Associated Talking Pictures (Ealing) 1934) Directed by Basil Dean
Scenario by Dorothy Farnum and Gordon Wellesley from the novel by R.D.Blakemore
Additional dialogue, Miles Malleson; Camera, Robert Martin; Art Director, Edward Carack; Music by G. Armstrong Gibbs; Lorna's Love Song by Rutland Boughton; Musical direction, Ernest Irving; 9 reels
Surprisingly, "Lorna Doone" was never released in this country, nor, it seems, even picked up for a TV package. One would have thought that, even in 1934, its strong action content would have made it for more suitable for U.S. release than many of the very ordinary British films that were being shown here, while later on, its roster of increasingly important names would likewise have justified a U.S. exposure. Again, far lesser British films (such as "Midshipman Easy") were brought over on that pretext. But such was not the case, and tonight's showing, is in the nature of a U.S. premiere. Incidentally, a later British reissue boosted Margaret Lockwood (initially third in the cast) to star billing, with a title card all to herself. That title-card has been removed from this print, but since the other credits were re-done to accommodate it, Lockwood's name now doesn't appear in the credits at all.

The Doones were Britain's own Daltons and Jesse James gang rolled into one, circa early 1600's. But since they were rascals pure and simple, their outlawry a matter of choice and disposition, not forced on them by the banks or the railroads, they have never acquired a really legendary spot in British folk-lore. Their part of England, and especially the Doone Valley, is somewhat of a tourist centre, but they take a very secondary place to Robin Hood in terms of romantic legend.

The novel, "Lorna Doone" — almost a rival to "The Last of the Mohicans" in its bloodthirsty content — has long been a popular British classic, and no movie has really done it justice. It's a novel in which nothing is done by halves and apart from pre-dating Edna Ferber in its time-span, also resembles the sagas of Selma Lagerlof in both its scope and in its use of landscape. In the book for example, much is made of the hero's almost superhuman strength, and it is constantly being tested. He reaches the Doone lands in the novel by a hazardous climb up a waterfall. (Most films had him diving down a waterfall, though presumably this meant he had to climb up on his way home!) The escape from the Doone village is done, in the novel, during a blizzard and across a frozen lake — a sequence of Griffith proportions. In tonight's version, the snow is there, but that is about all. Also, all the films use the shooting of Lorna at the end as merely an incident and motivation for the final chase and fight. In the novel, at least a chapter is devoted to whether or not Lorna will live or die, with great detail on the medical treatment, bleeding by leeches, and so forth.

"Lorna Doone" has been filmed three times each in this country and in Britain. In America, it was done by Biograph as a 2-reeler in 1915, by Maurice Tourneur for Ince in 1922 (an old Huff reliable) and again in the 50's, in Technicolor, with Richard Greene and Barbara Hale — this latter an only casually related swashbuckler. In Britain it was done in 1912, and was officially Britain's first 5-reeler feature, remade in 1920 — surprisingly, still only a 5-reeler, and of course tonight's 1934 version, made by the forerunner of Ealing Studios.

For ATP, then a relatively small company, it's a creditable and surprisingly ambitious production. Ealing had little expertise in action material of this size at that time, and Basil Dean (married to the star, Victoria Hopper) was at his best in musicals and romance, not this kind of gutsy fare. Individual action scenes — particularly the climactic chase and fight — are quite well done, but the big action scenes — the Doones' attack on the farmers for example — tend to be confused, somewhat in the manner of "Judith of Bethulia", and it's not until the dialogue tells us that we know who won or lost! That it often looks like a Western, complete with serial-like superimposed titles, agitated music and running inserts in the chases, is probably due to the influence of the Tourneur version, which itself looked like an Ince Western. It's known that cameraman Robert Martin saw and studied the Tourneur film. Often it copies his
pictorial style very closely, though such copying is largely limited to linking or transitional shots (silhouettes of the Doones riding at night), suggesting that Martim may have been given some leeway to shoot second-unit material on his own.

Pictorially, it works rather better than it does dramatically, since Edward Carrick's art direction is thoughtfully done too. Somehow, the actors - or at least, those playing the peasants - don't always seem able to cope with the colloquial English of the period without sounding stilted. As we indicated in our advance bulletin, the film makes an interesting comparison with Kevin Brownlow's remarkable "Winstanley," set in the same period. With far less money, Brownlow is able to recapture the feeling and the look of the period rather better - and his non-actors seem much more at home with the difficult form of the dialogue.

All things considered though, this "Lorna Doone", despite production shortcomings at times, is quite a fascinating and worthwhile production. I saw it in 1934 and remembered it extremely vividly; I had no chance to see it again until the acquisition of this print, some 44 years later, and it is surprising how strongly and accurately many of the images had stayed with me over such a long period. (Already images from last year's films are far less vivid!)

One minor mystery is solved with the rediscovery of the film. For years, Jack Hawkins always insisted that this was one of his films, yet the many quite extensive cast-lists available never included him, and reviews never mentioned him. (I couldn't recall his role, but after 44 years that's not surprising). He is in the film, and even has a closeup and some dialogue with that unique voice quite recognisable. But he appears loaded down with costumes, plumes and a beard, in a low-key-lit interior scene where he is in constant motion; He is the Doone who attacks Lorna at the mid-way point, and is bested in a fight with John Loder. From his costume, he would appear to be well up in the Doone hierarchy, not a mere scoundrel of George Chessboro proportions. One must assume therefore that his part was originally quite large, but trimmed down to this one sequence, which clearly could not be cut. He had already made several films prior to this, was an established if not yet very important actor, and certainly wouldn't have played the role as it now stands.

The supporting cast is particularly strong on established character names, and altogether it's a most enjoyable and interesting film to be able to introduce close to half-a-century after its production.

William K. Everson.