"COTTAGE TO LET" (Gainsborough-G.F.D., 1941) Directed by Anthony Asquith; produced by Edward Black; scenario by Anatole de Grunwald and J.O.C. Orton from the play by Geoffrey Kerr; Camera, Jack Cox; Music: Louis Levy; Art Direction, Vetchinsky; 9 reels With: Leslie Banks, Alastair Sim, John Mills, Jeanne de Casalis, George Cole, Michael Wilding, Carla Lehmann, Frank Cellier, Muriel Aked, Muriel George, Hay Petrie, Catherine Lacey, Roddy Hughes, Peter Gawthorne, Hugh Burden, Wally Patch, Brefni O'Rourke.

Given only limited theatrical release in the U.S. (by Monogram, under the title "The Stolen Bombsite") and later on afforded only sparse tv showings, "Cottage to Let" is virtually unknown in this country. Which is a pity, for it is both one of Anthony Asquith's most enjoyable films from his "light" period (which also includes the frothy farce "French Without Tears") and one of the most durable and least dated British spy films from the early days of the war. In a loose sense, it is a continuation of the Hitchcock thrillers of the 30's; a little more talkie perhaps, and a trifle too bogged down (at the beginning) with rather stagey characters, but the increasing interweaving of menace and humor and the indications of at least partial sympathy for the villains are very much in the Hitchcock mould. Nearing the climax, as the pace quickens, it becomes even more Hitchcockian, but the actual finale - bizarre, grim, economically resolved with no wasted "wrap-up" footage, is rather more in the Fritz Lang tradition. It has the usual Hitchcockian styles and overtones of the genre - horror, nerves, head games - but it does not have too much trouble guessing who is who, but nevertheless the red herrings are bounced around neatly and entertainingly. Alastair Sim as always is a delight, and George Cole, only 16 when he made this film, promptly went into the RAF until 1947, hence his apparent overnight change from boy to man in his next films. Catherine Lacey, the phoney nun from "The Lady Vanishes", is up to her old tricks again and there's an amusing performance from Jeanne de Casalis, a dithering Billie Burke type of comedienne who made a few films, but was better known for her radio and musical hall work. (She was also once Mrs Colin Clive!) For some reason, critical response to the film was not enthusiastic, and it was considered a let-down from the successful play. However, it was coupled on one of the Rank circuits with another film rated a disappointment, Hal Roach's "Road Show" - and this light-hearted double-bill proved to be one of the most popular and enjoyable movie combinations of the 40's.

"THE BAT WHISPERS" (United Artists, 1930) Written, produced and directed by Roland West; based on the stage play by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood, as produced by Wagenhals and Kemper; Camera: Ray June; Set Design, Paul Roe Crawley; 8 reels With Chester Morris, Una Merkel, Gustav von Seyffertitz, Maude Eburne, Chance Ward, Richard Tucker, Wilson Benge, Dewitt Jennings, Sidney D'Albrook, S.E. Jennings, Grayce Hampton, Hugh Huntley, Charles Don Clark, Ben Bard.

From the genteel British "cottage" play to this traditional American "old dark house" play is quite a step - and frankly, dramatically, "The Bat Whispers" does crack somewhat archaically. It had been done before as a silent, also by Roland West, and has been done again since as a lesser Vincent Price vehicle. This first talkie version, despite being designed to take advantage of the temporary boom in 70mm wide-screens, was somewhat of a flop commercially. The "old house" play had become somewhat of a cliche in the latter days of the silent era, and "The Bat Whispers" remained essentially the same movie, being far more concerned with pictorial inventiveness and lighting than with being a talkie, this at a time when stage adaptations were all the rage. Its stage origins are somewhat apparent in its stereotyped and rather irksome comedy interpolations, not helped by sub-standard sound quality, but otherwise it sustains the usual style of the silents, and as such seemed quite out of date in 1930. Perhaps because this is a thriller series, we seem inevitably to keep coming back to "Fritz Lang influence in these notes; if the right kind of pictures, we might see again that a great many scenes in the film directly derive from Lang. The remarkably impressionistic bank-robery scene is pure Lang, as is the black gloved hand snuffing out the candle, a happy borrowing from "Metropolis". But after all, no two directors have specialised in the thriller genre as much as Lang and Hitchcock, so it is only natural that one should find constant echoes of, or borrowings from, their works in thematically or stylistically related films.

Space limitations preclude other necessary comments on the film, or on Roland West, but these matters can be covered in the pre-screening comments.

--- Wh. K. Everson ---