ARCHIVE NIGHT

Response to our initial "Archive Night" last season was uniformly good, many of the audience (perhaps immunized by now against our sometimes bizarre choices) not admitting to any real distinction between it and the regular shows, and feeling it superior to some of them. All well and good. There is a difference however, and will continue to be, and as long as audiences are served a rather specialised nature of these extra programs I am certainly delighted if they are accepted on an equal level. The common denominator in tonight's films is that both are essentially showcases for stars, and of no great filmic, artistic or historic merit otherwise.

THE MAN WHO CHANGED HIS NAME (Julius Hagen/Twickenham Productions, released by Universal, 1934) Directed by Henry Edwards; screenplay by F. P. Fowler from a play by Edgar Wallace; camera, Sydney Blythe; 75 mins.


U.S. audiences probably know little of Julius Hagen, an interesting British independent film-maker whose productions were invariably old-fashioned, usually peopled by has-been in the boxoffice sense) old-time directors and actors, and occasionally distinguished by a "special" such as Conrad Veidt's "The Wandering Jew". But, at least for British tastes, they were solid, well-made and satisfactory films, and once in a while one of them would turn out well enough to be sold away to a major company instead of being released through Hagen's own company. "The Man Who Changed His Name" was picked up by Universal. Its title, and the Edgar Wallace authorship, suggest a real thriller; actually it's all talk and no action, but rather surprisingly, after a slowly meandering stagey beginning, the really interesting plot does begin to attract attention, and then to grip it. It's a slow moving little tale, somewhat like "The Green Goddess". It may it switches mood and leads the audience up the garden path. However, its main reason for inclusion in this series is the magnificent Lynn Harding - a fine stage and screen actor, who had all too few filmic opportunities, and who is best remembered over here as the finest and most filmic of the British Meriartys. (You may also recall his superb cameo as the old he and race car driver in the first "Goodbyes Mr. Chips"). Harding is both amusing as the actor and at the same time one of great bravura style; he obviously loves his role here, tackling every line with both a flourish and/or a nuance -- usually both at the same time. It's a sheer joy to watch him work -- less of a ham than Tod Slaughter, yet certainly something of a barnstormer. The plot does have some surprises, a fadeout fillip, a quite British dialogue ("beauty" is a word that gets a good work-out) and some storm-effects that must have been bumbled by having that the Universal trademark was to be applied on to them. But it's Harding's show, just as "Old English" was Arliss'. Economical and stagey it may be, but with Harding around it doesn't seem to matter, and then when the absorbing story line develops -- in its own good time -- it seems almost an extra bonus.

Ten Minute Intermission

DEVOTION (Ko Pathe, 1931) Directed by Robert Milton; Associate Producer, Harry Joe Brown; Screenplay by Graham John and Horace Jackson, from the original story "A Little Flat in the Temple" by Pamela Wynne; Camera, Hal Mohr; 75 mins.

With Leslie Howard, Ann Harding, Robert Williams, O. P. Heggie, Louise Clower, Hale, Dudley Digges, Alison Skipworth, Doris Lloyd, Ruth Weston, Joan Carr, Joyce Coad, Douglas Scott, Tempe Pigott, Forrester Harvey, Margaret Daily, Pat Somerset, Claude King, Oliver Tait, Donald Stewart, Cyril Daleyante.

"Devotion" is exactly the kind of film that needs an "Archive Night" framework.

Several times over the past ten years the title has come up in post-screening discussions, and Harding and Howard devotees have seemed astonished that it wasn't given a priority screening long ago. The fact is that its interest -- and merit -- is very largely limited to the Howard/ Harding playing, and it's the kind of film that could serve as rough, stagey and old-fashioned, and as such a bad advertisement for the cause of old film - if shown purely as a film, and not with the emphasis on its showcase values for the stars' acting talents. Anyway here it is finally, hopefully in the right framework. The combination of title and stars is a little misleading; far from the emotional film in the "Secrets" manner that it suggests, it is actually a light and sometimes rather vague piece of romantic nonsense, with Howard in a role that accidentally predates in some ways his F. R. H. "Pygmalion". It doesn't take even its own part. His romantic material very seriously and tends to remain very stagey, but the cast is certainly full of grand old veterans, and providing not too much is expected, is certainly an enjoyable if forgettable little work.

William K. Everson

Copies of the Fall schedule are available this evening.

As a postscript to the "The Man Who Changed His Name" notes: I should have stressed that the director, Henry Edwards, is of course the same Henry Edwards who directed and starred in the silent "East is East", a well-liked film last season.