THE GREEN MAN (British Lion, 1956) Produced and written by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat from their play "Meet a Body"; Directed by Robert Day and Basil Dearden; Camera, Gerald Gibbs; Music, Cedric Thorpe Davies; Art Director, Wilfrid Shingleton; 89 mins.

With: Alastair Sim (Hawkins); George Cole (WilliamBlake); Terry-Thomas (Boughtflower); Jill Adams (Ann Vincent); Raymond Huntley (Sir George Uphott); Avril Angers (Hippolyta); John Chandon (Macbeth); Doris Bryen (LadyUpott); Doris Nelson (Reginald); Eileen Moore (Joan Wood); Cyril Chamberlain (Sgt. Bassett); Doris Yorke (Mrs Bostock); Arthur Brough (Landlord); Maria Burke (Felicitia); Vivienne Wood (Annabel); Peter Bull (General Nire); Arthur Lowe (Radio Salesman); Michael Ripper (Waiter); Leslie Weston (Porter); Terence Alexander (BBC Announcer).

SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS (Associated British Picture Corp., 1960) Directed by Robert Hamer
Produced by Hal E. Chester and Douglas Rankin; screenplay by Patricia Moyes, Hal E. Chester and Peter Utstein from the novels by Stephen Potter; Camera, Ernest Häller; Music, John Addison; 94 mins.

With: Alastair Sim (Stephen Potter); Ian Carmichael (Henry Palfrey); Janette Scott (April Smith); Terry-Thomas (Raymond DeLauney); Dennis Price (Dunstan Dorchester); Edward Chapman (Clytostate); Kynaston Reeves (General); Irene Handl (Mrs Stringer); John Le Messurier (Skinner); Hugh Paddick (Instructor); Peter Jones (Dudley Dorchester).

The best years of British cinema's post-war peaking of sophisticated comedy might fairly reliably be placed between 1946 and 1954, years that encompassed such films as "Kinds Hearts and Coronets", "She and Cry" and "Genevieve". In terms of Sim alone, one might place his peak as being between the superb "Green for Danger" (1946), and due for a revival here next Summer; and "Folly To Be Wise" (1952). This doesn't mean that there wasn't good comedy before or after that period; it just means that these three films, the classic "Kind Hearts and Coronets" (1949), "Shadows of the Mind" (1955) and the last release before his death, "Laughter in Paradise" of 1959, seemed rather to define the time, though it's doubtless worth a second look today. However, the success of "Kinds Hearts and Coronets" and of "Folly To Be Wise" was due in part to Sim's hit with his stride, seems a little less apparent today. Many of the films of that period have either disappeared or been relegated to television; and in any case, this whole cycle of relatively sophisticated comedy was soon supplanted by the endless "Carry On...." and "Confessions of....." comedies, so increasingly laborious, vulgar and heavy-handed, that almost anything that went before seemed like a veritable oasis of wit by comparison. Tonight's two films, both vastly enjoyable, were not at the time considered in the same way as those which certainly gained in value and appeal due to the deterioration of British comedy since, and of course because they are Sim vehicles, which gives them a head start over most of the competition.

"The Green Man" is the better of the two, not only because it is a little earlier and thus further away from standardisation, but also because it derives from a play by Launder and Gilliat, and therefore has the benefit of their wit, charm, and their ability to work with it from the start. "Kind Hearts and Coronets" was just in the tradition of "Kinds Hearts and Coronets", although the original play by Launder and Gilliat preceded "Kind Hearts" by some ten years. Sim's pantomime, especially in the opening reel, is a delight, and there are some marvellous moments for supporting players too, particularly pompous Raymond Huntley, Britain's male Margaret Dumont, expressing dismay when the specialty of the day at a rural restaurant is chopped toad! Jill Adams was one of Britain's few attempts at cultivating their own Marilyn Monroe, and like most of them (even including Diane Dors) she was just too lovely to kill it off, but she adds some welcome glamour here. Launder and Gilliat were both too busy on other projects at the time to direct it (other than helping out on odd scenes) themselves, and initially it was to be co-directed by Robert Day (a former cameraman here being given his first chance to direct) and Alastair Sim. But Sim, whom everybody loved and respected, was frustrating if not impossible to work with in a situation like that and he withdrew, the experienced Basil Dearden coming in to lend a considerable though uncredited hand.

Associated British theatre had the lightness of touch in comedy that one found in the Ealing or British Lion films, and "School for Scoundrels" does lack subtlety, some of which might be traced to the omnipresence of ex-Dead End Kid Hal Chester as co-producer and co-writer. No wonder, it is more than saved by its pace, its variety of incident, the delightfully underplayed lessons and speeches from Sim, and by a fine cast of both relative newcomers (like Ian Carmichael) and comparative veterans (like Dennis Price). It's also helped by the fresh beauty, charm and grace of Janette Scott, who ("Now and Forever" excepted) was not used too well by British studios, but was certainly a major asset to the 20-odd films in which she appeared, many of them quite pleasing comedies like "As Long As They're Happy", "Happy is the Bride" and "Double Bunk". But although Ian Carmichael technically the star, it's really Sim's show all the way, and while it was far from his last film (and in fact the last of those appearing that evening), it was also his last, and one of the last of Sim comedy. It's a happy circumstance that Sim has become so popular with New School audiences just as we are approaching the end of the trail with George Arliss (not that there aren't Arliss films well worth repeating). While we run through the remaining Sim films we must of course also be thinking of another eccentric to spotlight in the future. There really isn't enough of Robert Morley, alas, or Raymond Huntley either, and Fred Deeny is buried in too many British '50s of dubious merit. But there's plenty of Sim to keep us occupied in the meantime.

William K. Everson

Program ends approx. 10.45 (No discussion session afterwards)