Only the British could create, sustain and actually enjoy the incredible system of regiments vacations that take place annually in Holiday Camps, institutions writing all of dowser and supervision of concentration camps. By way of explanation however, it should be noted that they did, and seemingly still do, fulfill a certain need.

The British annual holiday is a major event. Accommodation is always scarce, and the Summer holidays are always advanced in advance, often in the preceding Winter. Right after Christmas all of the English newspapers are full of enticing advertisements for holidays seven months hence. Particularly in the 50's, when the English weather was somewhat less reliable than it is now (and even now its reliability is somewhat diminished) the hard-working (and often family man) could afford to book a relatively expensive two weeks by the sea -- and then, when the time came, finding himself confronted with two weeks of rain. The Holiday Camps (largely set up by a man named Billy Butlin, who died a much-honored millionaire only last year) were situated by the sea, to take advantage of good weather if it chose to appear. But they also supplied indoor swimming, dancing, movies and other frivolities, so that, depending on one's definition of a good time, a holiday could be guaranteed. The Holiday Camps flourished in the 50's, and even now, when European vacations have become more the norm, are tremendously popular still, perhaps even more so with inflation on the rise.

In a sense though, the holiday camps stressed the kind of class distinction that, apart from the war years, has always been rampant in Britain. Obviously the people who went there were not well-to-do -- they were generally people with limited money who couldn't afford to risk what they'd put aside for vacations. And too, anybody who could be really happy at a holiday camp, would automatically be a rather passive, non-creative type, without the imagination to create diversions on his own, and happy to accept total regimentation. Obviously one can't make total generalisations about anything, but I think it's safe to say that the British as a whole are a genially dull race, springing to life only in times of dire emergency (such as a war) -- and that the dullest of these people wind up at holiday camps.

Having gathered a collection of such types together for this movie, the writers then proceed to manipulate and use them to underline certain British stereotypes and attitudes. There is even a form of condescension in the collection of writers; Godfrey Winn for example, was a writer of popular middle class emotional and romantic stories for ladies magazines and radio. As a feeling that everyone could be out of touch with, essentially British too -- the sensible (if not particularly well educated) father as undisputed head of the household, the rather silly wife, and as compensation, an attractive modern daughter who is meant to indicate that contemporary girls have learned from the mistakes of their mothers, though still not enough to threaten male dominance in the household. Even further, one finds the real "danger" of stepping out of one's class encapsulated in the role of the pathetic, blindfolded father played by Eama Cannon. If she had been smart enough to stay with her "own kind", she wouldn't have found up with the aristocratic bounder (Dennis Price) who turns out to be a sex killer! (Incidentally, his character gave the film more bite as I topicality than it might seem to have today, since it was based fairly closely on one of those perennial British mass murderers that are always a part of the English scene. This particular one had been caught and hanged only shortly before the film's release).

I don't want to suggest that these elements make the film a serious essay. It is essentially an entertainment, primarily a comedy balanced by enough drama to give it the wide "Grand Hotel" kind of appeal. But these elements do make it a more useful film than its competent but modest entertainment values might suggest.

---over---
Had it been made during the war, its whole approach would have been different. But here, quite unwittingly, is a film showing how - once the need for unity was over - all the old attitudes of class distinction slip back. Even British movie star Patricia Roc, playing herself as the producer of a Beauty Contest prize, adopts a kind of Royal stance, playing down to her "subjects" who may never again have such a close contact with someone from the upper echelon of life.

For some entirely illogical reason, the British have always felt that documentarians should make good comedy directors. When Harry Watt switched from documentaries to features, it was via an Ealing comedy. Ken Annakin, formerly a documentarian and a good one, here makes his first feature with what is essentially a comedy - and one that surprisingly could have taken advantage of his documentary background but doesn't. There are only a few actuality shots of a real Holiday Camp incorporated, and most of it is a studio reconstruction, though quite accurate in its depiction of mood, activity, and all the attendant horrors. Incidentally, just as "The Egg and TM" introduced - and unleashed - Ma and Pa Kettle, so did this film introduce the Nuggett Family. A follow-up series was made, mostly directed by Annakin, and with Warner and Kathleen Harrison repeating their roles, in which the Nuggets journeyed abroad (although in life they would have gone back to the Holiday Camp year after year!) and got into politics, much as the Higginases and the Joneses did in their Holiday series. Even in Britain though, the Nuggetts didn't come too much of a furor and were retired after three back-to-back "adventures" in 1948 and 1949.

--- 10 Minute Intermission ---

THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS (Cineguild-General Film Distributors, 1949; released in the U.S. by Universal under the title "One Woman's Story", cut by 11 min.; tonight's print is of the full original version). Directed by David Lean; Produced by Ronald Neame; Camera, Guy Green; Screenplay by Eric Ambler, adapted by David Lean and Stanley Haynes, based on the novel by H.C. Wells; Music by Richard Addinsell; 95 mins.

With Ann Todd (Mary Justin); Claude Rains (Howard Justin); Trevor Howard (Steven Stratton); Betty Ann Davis (Miss Layton); Isabel Dean (Pat Moore); Arthur Howard (Mr. Layton); Wilfrid Hyde White (lawyer); Guido Lorraine (Manager), and Marcel Ponsin, Natasha Sokolova, Helen Puris, Jean Serret, Frances Waring, Wanda Rogerson.

"The Passionate Friends" made before as a silent in 1922, when it was a little more faithful to the Wells novel needs less background sketching-in than "Holiday Camp". It all takes place on a much higher level of society, the world of big business, politics, Mayfair apartments and holidays on the Riviera. The characters are less emotional, and better informed, as typified (in one sentence) by Ann Todd who, trying to cover up a moment of high stress, fiddles with the bookshelf and off-handly remarks, "Oh dear; you have Aristotle in with Sherlock Holmes again!" Coming just four years earlier and Trevor Howard worked on "Brief Encounter" (with Lean's "Great Expectations" and "Oliver Twist" coming in between) it is clearly an attempt to make a Hollywood-styled "Brief Encounter" - big, glossy, splassy, and with a Hollywood name to boot. Obviously it's not as good a film as its inspiration, but its magazine artificiality shouldn't blot out its tremendous craftsmanship. Lean was now at his peak as a film-maker, great film behind him but equally great ones ahead ("Hobson's Choice", "Bridge on the River Kwai" etc.) and it is a superbly mounted film. (Incidentally producer Neame and cameraman Green subsequently became directors too). It was not a big success, and Lean's next film "Madeleine" was even less so (though actually a very good film) but these two films represented only a momentary lull in his association with films that enjoyed both critical and boxoffice popularity. He left the Rank organization after "Madeleine" and joined other key Rank directors (Sidney Gilliat, Michael Powell, Carol Reed) in moving over to Korda, where Lean's first film "Brief Encounter" put him right back on top again. "The Passionate Friends" should be enjoyed for what it is - a glossy romance, as artificial in its own way as "Holiday Camp", but equally honest about reflecting attitudes in the social strata in which it takes place. Apparently the original negative is no longer available for printing and recent British prints, like this one, have a rather pale quality that does not do justice to Guy Green's camerawork, though it is noticeable mainly in the location vistas of lake and mountain, and is not particularly distressing in the studio/dramatic scenes.

William K. Everson

Program Ends: 10.55 approx. No discussion period

A reminder: the two British silent "primitive" shorts that arrived too late for our last silent program, will be added to the beginning of next week's program.