THE SQUATTER'S DAUGHTER (Australia, 1939) A Cinesound Production, directed by Ken G. Hall; Screenplay by Gayne Duxter and E.V. Timme from the play by Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan; Camera: Frank Hurley, assisted by George Malcolm; Production Manager, John Warwick; 60 mins.

With Jocelyn Howarth (Constance Worth), Grant Lindsey, John Warwick, Fred Macdonald, W. Lane Bayliff, Dorothy Dunkley, Owen Ainsley, George Cross.

Rather incredibly (since it does not seem to be that imposing a production) "The Squatter's Daughter" was, in 1939, the biggest grossing Australian talkie to date. Their output was not exactly prolific at that time however, and it was based on an extremely popular Australian play, which had also been filmed as an early silent. (In his later years, the play's co-author Bert Bailey, also became a very popular movie character-comedian, something after the style of Will Rogers). Ironically, "The Squatter's Daughter" is the kind of film that Australians, for publication, pretended to abhor, since it perpetuated the image of Australia as a land of sheep ranches and kangaroos. Yet however much they might resent this kind of film officially, they always flocked to see them. However, Australian westerns like this one were never as simple as their Hollywood counterpart. They meant more at the (local) boxoffice, and in an attempt to please everybody, often crammed in enough plot for a half-dozen features: this one brings in a long-lost son, reformation, native music, spells and sundry other elements in addition to its western type action. A major asset is the superb outdoor photography of Frank Hurley, one of the country's finest cinematographers, and a veteran of many silent documentary and location filmings. Ken G. Hall was Cinesound's leading director, a company man like Warners' Michael Curtiz, cheerfully taking on everything offered - from war spectacle to simple romance and slapstick comedy (at which he was not expert, although his George Wallace comedies were extremely popular). John Warwick, the film's villain (and also its production manager) later did rather well in British films of the late thirties and forties, but Jocelyn Howarth after a brief career in Hollywood "B" movies and serials came to a rather sad end.

THE OVERLANDERS (Ealing Studios, Britain, 1946) Written and directed by Harry Watt; Associate Producer Ralph Smart; Camera, Osmond Borradaile; Music by John Ireland; 91 mins.

With Chips Rafferty, John Nugent Hayward, Daphne Campbell, Jean Blue, Helen Grieve, John Fernside, Peter Pagen, Frank Ransome.

Australia was as far behind Britain in technical expertise in 1946 as Britain was behind Hollywood. Certainly Australia, on its own, could not then have made this film as effectively. The theme, mood and cast are wholly Australian, and perhaps the film goes a little too much out of its way to incorporate Australian speech colloquials and attitudes towards the land into its narrative. They're never false but they sometimes seem forced, and the passion with which an Australian might have delivered them is tempered by British documentary restraint. The production crew is wholly British, with Britain's foremost documentarian here making his third narrative feature, after almost a decade on shorts. Most of his films however, certainly the best of them, welded documentary and theatrical styles as neatly as here, a form of film-making that was increasingly prevalent in wartime British films, and helped to give them more of a national identity than ever before.

Despite its restraint, and a plot based on recent wartime actualities, the film has all the excitement of a Hollywood western, an aspect that British critics (at that time, ever-ready to pounce on Hollywood!) were quick to point out. It's quite certain that Howard Hawks saw this, and was much influenced by it in the making of "Red River". But along with all the action, there is a real feeling for the land --- and the aborigines who still inhabit it, much like American Indians of old --- and a genuine sense of poetry. (The shots of the breeze springing up, taking the smell of water to the cattle, are beautifully composed and edited). In the initial U.S. theatrical release, a number of elements were edited out, including a number of scenes involving aborigines, and the girl's wild chase across country to prevent the plane from taking off. They were smoothly excised and probably made a snappier film for the American action market, but subliminally that hindered the impact of the film. Our print tonight is of the full version. Chips Rafferty, who stars, had been in Australian films since before the war. A professional Australian much as John Ford was a professional Irishman, he was also quite a good businessman and, like Germany's Luis Trenker, frequently set up his own production deals. This film brought him very much to the fore, and other leads at Ealing followed, as well as roles in Hollywood films made in Australia. Incidentally, the very charming leading lady Daphne Campbell was a much better equestrienne than she was an actress; reputedly her voice was so broad and twangy that her role had to be totally dubbed by another actress before the film was released in Britain!

--- William K. Everson ---