THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 48: Program #7
March 16, 1984

Two British Films

LANGUISH LUCK (Paramount-British, 1937) Directed by Henry Cass; Produced by Anthony Havelock-Allan and British and Dominions Films; Story by Ronald Gower; Camera, Francis Carver; 76 mins; Screenplay, A.R. Rewilson, Ronald Gower; With George Carney (George Lovejoy); Muriel George (Mrs Lovejoy); Wendy Hiller (Mary Lovejoy); Nigel Stock (Joe Lovejoy); George Galleon (Sir Gerald Maydew); Marjory Hall (Lady Maydew); Effie Cuth (Lady Evelyn); and Beatrice Varley, John Ruddock, Peter Popple, Henry White, Tom Scott.

In 1938, Paramount would considerably upgrade their British output (viz "This Man in Love" and "French Without Tears" etc.) but until 1957, they made British films primarily to fulfill their British Quota obligations, and "Lancashire Luck," tho' a respectable little picture, is one of those. It's unambitious, down-home production designed for home consumption only, and given no U.S. release. Like Carol Reed's "Penny Paradise" and many other Capra-ish British comedies, it deals with a sudden win on the football pools, and the problems of a working class family encountering luxury-level money. It would be a pleasant time-killer for British audiences and not much more was it not for the presence of Wendy Hiller, a stage player since 1922, and here, at the age of 25, making her film debut. Although not given star billing, she takes over totally (not that there's much competition) with that following year she went right into the starring role in "Pygmalion", (what is surprising is that she made only two films in the 40's, "Major Barbara" and "The Card"), and in the 50's was already playing character roles, and indeed is still so today, in that area that remains her prime interest. One can't say that she is exactly a "method" actress here. In the first scene, George Carney, playing her Lancashire father, wanders in to enquire "Ea, what's to do? Summat up?" -- and daughter Hiller responds with an answer that suggests she has already been the beneficiary of Prof. Higgins' elocution lessons! However, that is a small complaint and a purely academic one, and perfectly written with her in mind, was by Ronald Gower, Hiller's husband. And the film offers another debut, this time directorial, from Henry Cass -- though he would return to shorts and documentaries, not returning to features until 1945, and only really hitting his stride in 1948 with "The Glass Mountain" and then "Last Holiday" and a whole string of elegant dramas and comedies forAssociated British Pathes. "Lancashire Luck" is minor and typically British-conscious in its plotting, but academically quite valuable and fascinating for its star- and debut-drama, incidentally, although this is an (un) 1948 reissue, the main titles were not redone to stress Hiller's new star status.

-- Ten Minute Intermission --

WHITE CORRIDORS (J. Arthur Rank, 1951) Directed by Pat Jackson; A Vic Film, released in the U.S. by Universal; Screenplay by Jan Read and Pat Jackson from the novel "Yeoman's Hospital" by Helen Ashton; Produced by Joseph Janni and John Croydon; Camera, Pennington Richards; Editor, Sidney Havers; 100 mins; With: Googie Withers (Dr. Sophie Dean); James Donald (Dr. Neil Martiner); Petula Clark (Joan Shepherd); Godfrey Tearle (Groom); Moira Lister (Dolly Clark); Jack Watling (Dick Groom); Barry Jones (Shoemaker); Basil Radford (Civil Servant); Nega Jenkins (Mrs Briggs); Henry Edwards (Philp Brewster); Dana Wynter (Marjorie Brewster); Geoffrey Keene (Dr. Macouzel); Avice Landone (Sister Jenkins); Jean Anderson (Sister Gater); Fabia Drake (Miss Farmer).

Despite - or perhaps because of - the upswing in hospital-locasted tv series, this film from more than thirty years ago holds up extremely well. It was never startlingly different or unusual, but it had a sensible restraint, a convincing set of people and circumstances, and a willingness to go against popular expectations. It is often amusing, always absorbing, and sometimes very moving. Its overall restraint must surely be the result of director Pat Jackson's earlier work in documentary films, including the remarkable "Western Approaches" ("The Raider" in the U.S.). It's something of a mystery why his career (a) never made much more use of his documentarian talents than is exhibited here, and (b) in fact never really went anywhere despite his obvious talents for directing "Encore," "White Corridors" was his first solo directing effort, and a good one; it was followed by some more pleasant British films, a brief stint in Hollywood (where he made an interesting thriller) and then back to England and a downhill path to such unworthy trifles as "What a Carve Up" and "Dead End Creek." Jackson could write well and was also a capable director, an able actor. Well, let's get going! What went wrong? Anyway, "White Corridors" is crisp well acted and manages to suggest most of the more unpleasant aspects of hospital life without ever having to get as medically explicit as many recent films have done.

Program Ends approx. 10:45. no discussion this evening.

-- William K. Everson

Please note: next week is the one week in every Spring series when I have to be absent. It is also the week when a Jazz Concert preceding the film show will probably be taking place in the auditorium until 7:30 or a few minutes later. The film program will begin as soon as possible, but without an introduction. Hold your questions for discussion sessions on the three remaining programs.