THE FORMAN WENT TO FRANCE (Ealing Studios, 1942) Directed by Charles Frend; Associate Producer/Director Alberto Cavalcanti; Screenplay by John Bington, Angus Maephail and Leslie Arliss from a story by J.B. Priestley, based on the true story of Melbourne Johns; Camera, Wilkie Cooper; Music, William Walton; Editor, Robert Hamer; 80 mins; With Clifford Evans (Fred Carrick); Tommy Trinder (Tommy); Constance Cummings (the American girl); Gordon Jackson (Jock); Robert Morley (French mayor); Paul Bonifas (Prefect); John Williams (English captain); Ernest Milton (Stationmaster); Francis L. Sullivan (Irish shopkeeper); Sir Charles; Mervyn Johns (official at passport office); Charles Victor, Bill Blewitt (specters); John Boxer (official); Thora Hird, Anita Palacine (barmaids) Almost all early wartime British films were either about the war, or took place against a wartime background. The initial war films (like Ealing's "Cockney in 1940 and "Ships With Wings" of 1941) were often an uneasy blend of British underplaying coupled with Hollywood-style scripting. By 1942 however, a major change had taken place; the plethora of documentaries being made had inevitably influenced narrative film, and more and more films like "Millions Like Us" and "Waterloo Road" were to mix qualities of warmth and humanity with the underplayed style of documentary, a new style of film-making that was to benefit British films in general. (In Hollywood the reverse was true, wartime documentaries being imbued with the sense of Showmanship of the purely entertainment film), "The Forman Went to France" is one of the first in this new style, and it holds up well, mainly because its basic story is not only a true one, but also a good adventure yarn in its own right, transcending the immediate wartime background of the Fall of France. Typical of so many Ealing films to come, it deals with the concerted efforts of "ordinary" people; the officers invariably turn out to be enemy agents, and British red-tape bungles the men down to their very last man as much of a menace as the Germans themselves! The property of its content lightens up at the film's end, and the cast (full of names who became more important later) is exceptionally interesting, marred perhaps (though only a little) by Tommy Trinder. Trinder was a cockney comedian whose music hall stand-up style never translated well into movies, and when, as here (in "The Bells Go Down"), also for Ealing, he attempts a semi-straight role, too much of the old comic persona remains (partly a fault of the writing of course, for the character to become as submerged in the narrative as it should. But these are minor flaws in a film that, while not forgotten - and while also a surprise success at the time - never seems to be shown.

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

THE MAN IN GREY (Gainsborough-General Film Distributors, 1943) Directed by Leslie Arliss; Produced by Edward Black; Screenplay by Margaret Kennedy, Leslie Arliss and Doreen Montgomery from the novel by lady Eleanor Smith; Camera, Arthur Crabtree; Music, Cedric Mallaby. (US release by Universal, 1945). 200 mins app. With Margaret Lockwood (Heather); Phyllis Calvert (Dorcas); Joan Greenwood (Marquis of Rohan); Stewart Granger (Peter Rokey); Raymond Lovell (Prince Regent); Norah Swinburne (Mrs Fitzherbert); Helen Haye (Lady Rohan); Martita Hunt (Miss Patchett); Amy Veness (Mrs Armstrong); Diana King (Jane Seymour); Beatrice Varley (gyepe); Roy Emerson (game-keeper); A.E.Matthews (auctioneer).

Despite their literary popularity (and profusion) British film-makers had never made too many historical romances. They were especially absent in the early days of the war, when it was felt (a) that their escapism wouldn't fit the wartime mood, and (b) that costly sets were risky because of the bombing raids. "The Man in Grey" was both a showcase for new stars, and a kind of escapist trial ballast - though it was not exactly tugged into the war's mainstream. It was a prologue and epilogue, its success was astonishing. Initially the critics liked it, but it went to heart and denegrate it when its popular success was so overwhelming! Even though Hollywood provided plenty of escapism, the film certainly showed that there was a big market for home-grown escapism too, and the film launched a long-running series of Gothic and Regency romances, most of them from Gainsborough, with "Fanny By Gaslight" and "Blanche Fury" almost certainly the best, and the tongue-in-cheek "Caravan" one of the most entertaining. It was only the second solo directorial assignment for Leslie Arliss (he'd directed too). My recollection is that 10 years back was an implied marriage for Otto Kruger at the end of THE HOUSEMATE. In actual fact, the film follows the novel and play exactly, with his bachelorhood retained.

WM. F. EVerson PROGRAM ENDS APPROX. 10:45., followed by brief discussion period.