THE NEW SCHOOL

FILM SERIES 76: Program #3

October 7, 1994

JACK HAWKINS AT EALING, 1956

THE LONG ARM (U.S. title "The Third Key"); Ealing 1956; Director: Charles Frend

Screenplay by Janet Green and Robert Barr from a story by Barr, additional dialogue by Dorothy and Campbell Christie; Camera, Gordon Dines; Music, Gerbrand Schuurman; 90 mins.

With: Jack Hawkins (Supt. Tom Halliday); Dorothy Alison (Mary Halliday); Michael Brooke Jr. (Tony Halliday); John Stratton (Sgt. Ward); Geoffrey Keen (Supt. Malcolm); Newton Blick (Cdr. Harris); Ralph Truman (Col. Blinkinsop); Joan Ambler (Shipping office cashier); Sydney Taffler (Stone); Richard Leech (night watchman); Meredith Edwards (Thomas); Ian Bannen (workman); Maureen Davis (his wife); George Rose (informant); Glyn Houston (Sgt.); Nicholas Parsons (P.C. Bates); Alec McCowan (surgeon); Ursula Howells (Mrs Elliot); John Welsh (estate agent); Gillian Webb (housewife); Maureen Delaney (Daily help); Harry Locke (second hand dealer); William Mervyn (Festival hall manager); Harold Goodwin (Somerset House official); Sam Kydd, Stratford Johns (Constables) and John Warlick, Julie Milton, Jameson Clark, Warwick Ashton, David Davies.

In tonight's two films Jack Hawkins plays a Scotland Yard inspector with problems at home as well as on the job ("The Long Arm") and a test pilot confronted with problems at home, at work and in the air ("Man in the Sky"). The two films together give him the opportunity to run a gamut both of his own special area, the strong outside, soft inside man ruled by integrity, and rarely permitting himself any weakness as a safety valve. The two films made consecutively (though we're running them in the reverse order, as they play better that way) are his last films for Ealing, and indeed, in The Long Arm, it was the last film made at Ealing before the company folded. Their last film, 1959's "The Siege of Pinchgut", directed by Harry Watt, was an interesting Australian-localised melodrama that we'd like to play in the future. The studio itself remained an entity, being used by BBC-TV for many years, and is now in the throes of being revamped as a regular production studio with announced plans to make "Ealing-type" films, though that may prove to be difficult without Ealing's remarkable cameraderie of players, directors, and craftsmen, and out of the time period into which Ealing fitted so well.

Very loosely, "The Long Arm" might be considered a higher-echelon parallel to Ealing's earlier success "The Blue Lamp", but concentrating on detection rather than the man on the beat. It uses London locations well, especially the then new Festival Hall area on the South Bank of the Thames, and is holding and engrossing rather than particularly thrilling.

TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION

MAN IN THE SKY (U.S. title "Decision Against Time") (Ealing-MGM, 1956)

Directed by Charles Crichton; Assoc. Producer, Seth Holt; Screenplay by William Rose and John Elderidge, from a story by Rose; Camera, Douglas Slocombe; Music by Gerbrand Schuurman; 87 mins.

With Jack Hawkins (John Mitchell); Elisabeth Sellars (Mary Mitchell); Catherine Schell (Kathleen Patchett); Nicholas McHattie (Nicholas Patchett); Gerald Lohm (Philip Mitchell); John Stratton (Peter Hook); Walter Fitzgerald (Conway); Edie Byrne (Ashmore); Donald Pleasence (Crabtree); Victor Maddern (Joe Biggs); Lionel Jeffries (Keith); Ernest Clark (Bennett); Russell Waters (Sim); Howard Marion Crawford (Ingram); Megs Jenkins (Mrs Ingram); Raymond Francis.

Rather like a low-key "Ceiling Zero", deliberately down-playing the tension on the ground, "Man in the Sky" gives Hawkins a role different from yet at the same time emotionally parallel to the one he had played in "The Long Arm". It's not in essence a typical Ealing story, and probably represents a kind of compromise in a deal worked out for six pictures for MGM release, of which it was the first. However, there are some surprises, especially the heated climactic exchange between Hawkins and his wife, perhaps dramatically a needed second climax, but also a reminder of the pre-war and wartime Ealing films in which Ealing recognised the (now outdated) position of the husband/father as undisputed master of the household, at least in British society of that period. The film is strongest in its opening and closing reels; if the middle section seems slacker, it is only because by then the plot has revealed that it is not going to be complex or spectacular but basically simple, and one knows that not a great deal is going to happen until the final solution. But like its co-feature, it is thoroughly satisfying in a way typical of Ealing. (Both films had the "U" censor certificate, the equivalent of the "G" here, but that doesn't mean that they're anything but intelligent and mature films). Incidentally we note in passing that both films are shown in the correct order of production and release, coming out (in Britain) some six months apart. --- Wm. K. Eversen

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