The Flying Deuces.

Magazine for fans of Laurel & Hardy and Abbott & Costello.

June 2026 Edition —Volume 2, Issue 4

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Pardon My Sarong

"That wild goose chase of yours is going to lay an egg. "

Welcome to the June 2026 edition of our newsletter. British weather is being typically British. BBQ's are under way, bank holidays where everyone (except me) heads to the beaches.

But for a brief moment we can enjoy some fun from the two duo's of Abbott and Costello and Laurel and Hardy.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Frances Ann Rafferty

Frances Anne Rafferty (June 16, 1922 – April 18, 2004) was an American actress, dancer, World War II pin-up girl and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer contract player.

Frances Anne Rafferty was born in Sioux City, Iowa, the daughter of Maxwell Lewis Rafferty and DeEtta Frances (née Cox) Rafferty. She was the younger sister of California educator and Republican politician Max Rafferty, whose wife was Frances (nee Longman) Rafferty.

At 1931, At the age of nine she moved with her family to Los Angeles. At a young age, she studied dancing, and her physical attributes and dancing skills led to work in the film industry.

Rafferty attended Miss Bryant's Day School and Bryant School while the family lived in Iowa. After moving to California, she graduated from University High School in Los Angeles.

Signed by MGM Studios, Rafferty made her film debut in 1942. [citation needed] She appeared in minor and secondary roles, and although she had a part in the 1944 film Dragon Seed with Katharine Hepburn and Walter Huston, her significant parts were limited almost exclusively to "B" movies. She played the female lead in "The Hidden Eyes"(1945). For instance, in 1948, she starred with Hugh Beaumont in the film noir Money Madness, directed by Sam Newfield. Her only role in a major film was in Bud Abbott and Lou Costello in Hollywood (1945).

During World War II, she was a volunteer pin-up girl for YANK magazine, a publication for the soldiers of the United States military.

In 1949, Rafferty was a performer on the anthology series Oboler Comedy Theater on ABC television.

From 1954 to 1959, she appeared as Ruth Ruskin Henshaw in all 156 episodes of the Desilu Studios sitcom December Bride on CBS. When fellow cast member Harry Morgan and actress Cara Williams starred in the 1960-62 December Bride spin off sitcom, Pete and Gladys, Rafferty was subsequently cast in seven episodes in the role of "Nancy".

Rafferty appeared in a number of different television programs throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Among them were two guest appearances on Perry Mason. She portrayed Heather Marlow in "Never Look Back", the Season 4, Episode 18, installment of My Three Sons in 1964.

After her retirement from acting in 1965, she made a final appearance in a 1977 episode of the crime drama The Streets of San Francisco.

She was married to her first husband from 1944 until their divorce in 1947. (Rafferty's biography on The Des Moines Register's DataCentral site gives Rafferty's first husband's name as "Maj. John Horton".[4] An Associated Press news story dated February 18, 1947, reported "Movie Actress Frances Rafferty obtained a divorce today from John E. Horton, former army major.")

Rafferty died in 2004 in Paso Robles, California.

Howard Christie. Producer

Howard Christie (September 16, 1912 – March 25, 1992) was an American producer of films and television.

Christie was born in Orinda, California and graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1929.[1] He attended UC Berkeley, where he was a center on the Cal Bears football team and an All-American. He had planned to study medicine, but became interested in Hollywood after playing a small part in a 1935 anti-Communist comedy movie called Fighting Youth.

After his initial exposure to Hollywood and the film-making industry, Christie developed a preference for the production side of the business. He began as an assistant production manager at Universal, then transitioned to assistant director, and director. Ultimately, he became a producer, a role which he filled until his retirement in 1970. After serving as associate producer on the 1945 Deanna Durbin film Lady on a Train, he mostly produced Westerns and comedies. He produced more than 40 films including Against All Flags, Away All Boats, several Ma and Pa Kettle movies, and several Abbott and Costello movies including Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man (1951), Abbott and Costello Go to Mars (1953), Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy (1955), and Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Kops (1955).

In the late 1950s, as Universal reduced its production of western and comedy films, Christie moved into television. He became a vice president in Universal Studios' television division. He was responsible for the production of several popular Western-themed TV series, notably Wagon Train for the entirety of its 8-year, 280 -episode life (1957–1965). He was involved in the production of several other TV westerns, including 30 episodes of Laredo (1965–1967) and five episodes of The Virginian.

He retired in 1970 at age 58, and died in 1992 in Oak View, California.

Some of his most notable feature films include:

Classic Comedies (Abbott & Costello):

Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man (1951)

Abbott and Costello Go to Mars (1953)

Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (1953)

Abbott and Costello Meet the Keystone Kops (1955)

Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy (1955)

Action & War:Away All Boats (1956)

Sci-Fi / Horror:The Monolith Monsters (1957)

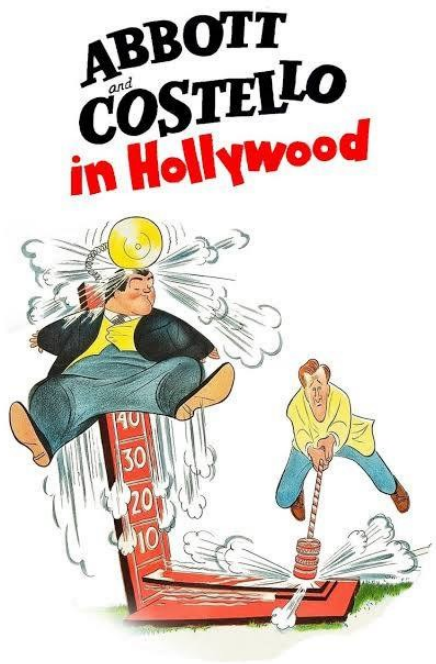
Westerns:

No Name on the Bullet (1959)

Journey to Shiloh (1968)

Outside of his extensive feature filmography, Christie is also widely recognized for producing the popular TV western series Wagon Train.

Abbott and Costello In Hollywood



Abbott and Costello in Hollywood is a 1945 American black-and-white comedy film directed by S. Sylvan Simon and starring the comedy team of Abbott and Costello alongside Frances Rafferty. Made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, it was produced by Martin A. Gosch.

A barber, Buzz Curtis, and a porter, Abercrombie, work for a Hollywood salon. They are sent to the office of agent Norman Royce to give him a haircut and a shoeshine. On the way there they run into former co-worker Claire Warren, who is about to star as the lead in a new musical. At the same time her co-star Gregory LeMaise, whose fame is dwindling, arrives and invites her to join him at lunch. She declines, which angers him.

While at the agent's office Buzz and Abercrombie witness LeMaise enter and declare to Royce that he cannot work with Claire. Royce, who has just seen a young singer, Jeff Parker audition, fires LeMaise and offers the job to Parker. This causes LeMaise to change his mind, and Royce does as well, giving LeMaise his job back. Buzz and Abercrombie quickly switch careers and become Parker's agents, and head to the studio's chief, Mr. Kavanaugh, to find a role for Parker.

When they meet up with Kavanaugh, it is because they just crashed their car into his at the Mammoth Studios gate.[3] Kavanaugh bans them from the lot, but they manage to sneak back in with a group of extras. Once inside they find themselves at the wardrobe department and Buzz gets dressed as a cop and Abercrombie as a tramp. They use their newfound disguises to roam the lot. Things do not work out well for Abercrombie. He wanders onto a movie set where a saloon brawl is being filmed and a scene calls for a mannequin to be thrown off a high balcony. Abercrombie, who can't give himself away by talking, ends up playing the part of the mannequin.

Later, Buzz and Abercrombie try to help Parker get the role by getting LeMaise out of the picture by trying to start a fight with him. Their plan is to photograph him hitting Abercrombie and then having him arrested. The plan goes off without a hitch until Abercrombie falls overboard after being hit and is feared drowned. LeMaise decides to hide, and Parker is given the role in his place. LeMaise eventually discovers that Abercrombie is still alive and chases him around the backlot. LeMaise eventually is caught, and Claire and Parker become famous when the film is successful. Subsequently, Buzz and Abercrombie become big-time agents in Hollywood.

Cast

Bud Abbott as Buzz Kurtis

Lou Costello as Abercrombie

Frances Rafferty as Claire Warren

Bob Haymes as Jeff Parker (as Robert Stanton)

Jean Porter as Ruthie

Dean Stockwell as Dean

Warner Anderson as Norman Royce

Rags Ragland as himself (as 'Rags' Ragland)

Mike Mazurki as Klondike Pete

Abbott and Costello In Hollywood

Carleton G. Young as Gregory LeMaise

Donald MacBride as Dennis Kavanaugh

Edgar Dearing as first studio cop

Marion Martin as Miss Milbane

Arthur Space as Director

William Phillips as Kavanaugh's assistant, (as Wm. 'Bill' Phillips)

The Lyttle Sisters as Singing Quartette at Ciro's (uncredited)

Robert Emmett O'Connor as studio cop (uncredited)

Filming took place from April 10 through June 1, 1945, with some retakes filmed in July.

During production, Abbott and Costello returned to Universal Studios on May 13 for retakes on The Naughty Nineties (1945).

This is the last of three feature films that Abbott and Costello made on loan to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer while under contract to Universal; the other two features were Rio Rita (1942) and Lost in a Harem (1944).

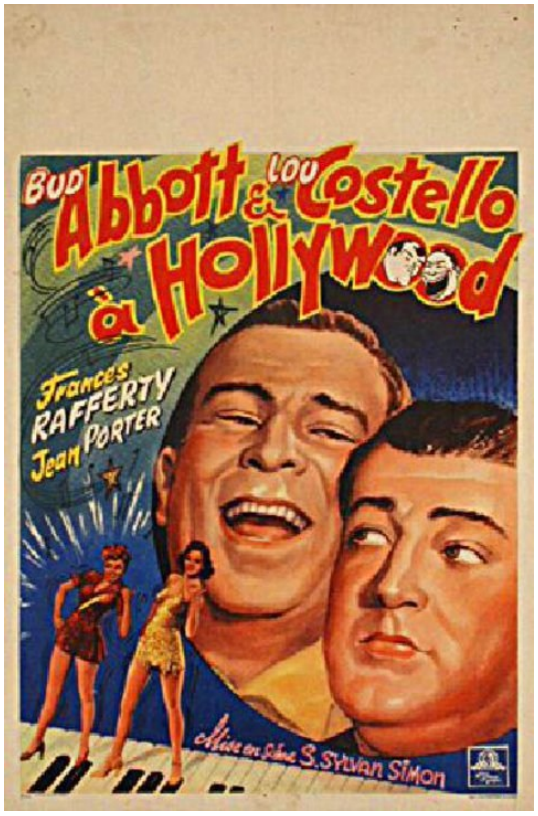
Many stars appear in the film as themselves, such as Lucille Ball, Rags Ragland, Preston Foster, and Dean Stockwell, and director Robert Z. Leonard.

The name of the production company in the film is Mammoth Studios, in an effort by the MGM "to cast itself, or versions of itself, in its own films".

Insomnia is one of the routines that Abbott and Costello perform. Costello is unable to fall asleep, so Abbott gives him a record that is guaranteed to put anyone to sleep. However, no one is around to turn it off, and when the needle reaches the end, it starts skipping, which wakes him. Abbott agrees to stay awake to turn it off when it is over, but falls under the spell of the record and goes to sleep himself. They try again, this time with cotton in Abbott's ears (a sequence that was used in the MGM compilation film, (That's Entertainment, Part II). When this also fails, Costello ties a string from his foot to the record player. The thought is when he falls asleep, his foot will drop shutting off the machine, but instead it turns on the radio, which blasts a loud march!

Bosley Crowther of The New York Times wrote: "Among the real rib-tickling sketches in this film the two high spots are Costello's schooling in the tonsorial art and his desperate battle to overcome insomnia. During

these interludes his brilliant pantomimic talents are brought into full play. As for the rest, well, even half a laugh is better than none."[5] Variety wrote: "An Abbott and Costello picture may not be an artistic triumph, but the duo certainly try hard enough to make audiences laugh. Their latest, Abbott and Costello in Hollywood, is no exception; it should do fairly good business."[6] Harrison's Reports wrote that the film "should more than satisfy those who respond easily to [Abbott & Costello's] particular brand of slapstick humour."



Edwin B Willis. Set Designer

Edwin Booth Willis (January 28, 1893 – November 26, 1963) was an American motion picture set designer and decorator.

Willis worked exclusively at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios for his entire career. During his career as a set designer Willis worked on over 600 separate productions. The Internet Movie Database lists his 577 film credits as set decorator, 163 credits as interior decorator and 24 credits as art director.

He was nominated for the Academy Award in his profession 32 times, in certain years receiving multiple nominations. Willis won the Oscar on eight occasions. He was born in Decatur, Illinois and died of cancer in Hollywood, in 1963.

Willis was romantically linked to Sydney Guilaroff, who was known as the first single man to adopt children in America (two sons named Jon and Eugene).

Academy Awards

Interior decoration (Colour)

- Blossoms in the Dust - 1941
- The Yearling - 1946

Interior decoration (Black & white)

- Gaslight - 1944

Art direction/Set decoration (Colour)

- Little Women - 1949
- An American in Paris - 1951

Art direction/Set decoration (Black & white)

- The Bad and the Beautiful - 1952
- Julius Caesar - 1953
- Somebody Up There Likes Me - 1956

Academy Award nominations

Interior decoration

- The Great Ziegfeld - 1936
- Romeo and Juliet - 1936

Interior decoration (Black & white)

- When Ladies Meet - 1941
- Random Harvest - 1942
- Madame Curie - 1943
- The Picture of Dorian Gray - 1945

Interior decoration (Colour)

- Thousands Cheer - 1943
- Kismet - 1944
- National Velvet - 1945

Art direction/Set decoration (Black & white)

- Madame Bovary - 1949
- The Red Danube - 1950
- Too Young to Kiss - 1951
- Executive Suite - 1954
- I'll Cry Tomorrow - 1955
- Blackboard Jungle - 1955

Art direction/Set decoration (Colour)

- Annie Get Your Gun - 1950
- The Merry Widow - 1952
- Lili - 1953
- Young Bess -1953
- The Story of Three Loves - 1953
- Brigadoon - 1954
- Lust For Life - 1956

Art Direction/Set Decoration

- Les Girls - 1957
- Raintree County - 1957

British Film and Radio Comedy

In the 1950s, British studios turned to a few comics on the variety circuit to star in their films. Norman Wisdom was one such performer. His physical half-wit humour appealed to mass audiences in such features as Trouble in Store (1953), One Good Turn (1955) and Man of the Moment (1955). Although not loved by all here at home, Wisdom's films became the biggest-selling box office success of all time in Albania. As a result, executive producers pushed Wisdom through a turnover of sixteen films in a ten-year period.

Other stage comedians who made films did not fare so well. Sandy Powell failed miserably in Cup Tie Honeymoon (1948). Frank Randle's badly-edited films did him no favours, It's A Grand Life (1953) appearing tired in comparison to the new crop of comedies. The young Max Bygraves was teamed up with Hal Monty for not one, but two awful films: Bless 'Em All (1948) and Skimpy in the Navy (1949). And poor Tommy Trinder appeared in a cheap army comedy, You Lucky People (1955) filmed through a flawed lens.

By the end of the 1950s, one particular British comic stood out as a unique movie character. As part of the RAF entertainment unit he had delighted troops with his different comical personae. His move into BBC radio was advanced by a self-recommendation in which he convinced a producer that he would be perfect for the medium. Working on The Goons led to a small role in the Ealing Studios black comedy The Ladykillers but it wasn't until the end of the decade that Peter Sellers came into his own. In 1959, he received the BAFTA Best Actor Award (beating Laurence Olivier) for I'm All Right Jack.

Other radio stars would soon transfer to movies: the supporting cast for Hancock's Half Hour was a case in point. Kenneth Williams, Sid James, June Whitfield and Hattie Jacques all went on to join one of Britain's biggest movie franchises of all time (beating Bond): the Carry On series. Cheap, cheerful, risqué farces, these pictures were a cross between music-hall gags and seaside postcard innuendo. Thirty-one films, a TV series, three Christmas specials and three West End shows later, Carry On finally died out in 1992.

In the sixties, the light entertainment stars of (small screen) TV were also being contracted for the big screen. Morecambe & Wise enjoyed a modicum of success with The Intelligence Men (1965) and The Rivera Touch (1966). Charlie Drake made Petticoat Pirates (1961), The Cracksman (1963) and Mr Ten Per Cent (1967); and of course, Tony Hancock gained notoriety for The Punch and Judy Man (1963) and The Rebel (1961). But the audience that really adored all of these comics was the armchair one at home.

Two British television comics who would flourish in film were Peter Cook and Dudley Moore: Monte Carlo Or Bust (1969) and the unequalled Bedazzled (1967) made them into household names, but it was as solo performers that they really grew into the medium. Both starred in many films and Cook's recognised creative genius built expectations of success. It was, however, Moore's film career that took off and The National Alliance of Theater Owners named him the Top Box Office Star-Male of the Year, 1983.

British Fil, and Radio

Studios in the 1970s began to offer established TV audiences film spin-offs from their favourite sitcoms - Dad's Army, On The Buses, Bless This House, Steptoe & Son and The Dick Emery Show were among the most popular. But none of these television crossovers would be as successful as the BBC sketch show whose distinctive brand of comedy would become famous the world over. The Monty Python's Flying Circus team only made four films, but their novel take on life and historical subjects created one of the most exceptional, talked-about movies of all time. When polls are taken of the greatest comedies ever, Monty Python's Life Of Brian (1979) is always in the top three.

Life of Brian also bought together businessman Denis O'Brien and former Beatle George Harrison, who stepped in to produce when EMI pulled out a week before filming was due to commence, and Handmade Films was created. Their contribution to the British comedy film output of the 1980s and 90s was significant: Privates On Parade (1982) and Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels (1998) are just two of their gems.

The six members of Python (even Eric Idle) would all individually go on to make waves in British comedy film, from fantasies such as Time Bandits (1981), to beautiful period pieces like The Missionary (1982) to silly crime capers such as A Fish Called Wanda (1988). Between them, these six comedians have been involved as actors, writers and directors in over two hundred British comedy movies.

Since the 1980s, the British film comedy industry has become more than the quaint relative of its US cousin. It has its own stable of auteurs and performers who consistently win awards. Political, regional and class issues handled by directors like Bill Forsyth, Bruce Robinson and Peter Chelsom and box-office regulars like Richard Curtis, Mike Leigh and Guy Ritchie; Hollywood casting interlopers like Rowan Atkinson, Russell Brand, Billy Connelly, Steve Coogan, Lee Evans, Eddie Izzard, Simon Pegg and Tracey Ullman.

British film comedy has gained year-on-year in quality, acclaim and financial health. Its output may be smaller and slower than that of the US, but the laughs-per-minute and innovative storylines from Withnail and I (left) to Kill List are distinctly British. One thing we know for sure, it's certainly left the French behind.

Will Hay

William Thomson Hay. December 6 1888 – April 16 1949

The greatest asset to British comedies of the 1930s was the rich talent pool of the music hall and Variety theatres. Swathes of comics had a try at starring on the silver screen; some managed only a film or two, while others went on to make successful series of features lasting several years. Amongst the latter group, Will Hay was certainly the finest, and undoubtedly the one whose work stands up best today. For 30 years, on stage, radio and a series of brilliant comedy films, he mined a rich vein of character comedy from his creation of a broken-down old schoolmaster. Everything about this tattered pedagogue suggested a fraying, blundering seediness: the mortarboard crumpled slightly, the gown a little tatty. A pair of crooked pince nez perched perilously on the end of his nose, allowing him to peer shiftily at a world forever on his tail. Across his bald head there was a doomed combover almost valiant in its failed optimism. Coughing and sniffing haughtily, he spewed out garbled excuses and tried in vain to maintain control of his class. Barely a step ahead of his students, and always with some superiors out to fire him, it was bluff alone that carried him through the day.

The idea had been many years in development before settling on its eventual, glorious form. Born in Stockton-on-Tees in 1888, Hay was busy building a career in concert parties and music halls, when he was inspired by his sister Eppie's tales of her life as a schoolteacher. The idea worked through various incarnations, including a drag act as schoolma'am and a comic song titled "Bend Down", before expanding into a sketch, "The Fifth Form at St Michael's". The act began to take on classic status when Hay began to eschew gags and monologues, focusing instead on the interactions, and reactions, in the classroom. Obviously, to do this, the school master required a class to derive the maximum comic interplay. Setting his efforts apart from standard schoolroom knockabout, Hay hit on the inspired idea of adding an old man, so dense he has never been allowed to graduate from school. Thus he established in his 'school', three ages of ignorance. One of his most inspired comic ideas, this would later form the basis for his best films. Hay would attempt to preside over the class, his efforts to impart learning brought down by a combination of his own ignorance, the pranks of his children, and the total dumb incoherence of the old man. As a result, lessons would descend into elongated, confused discussions based around the class's misunderstanding, and Hay's failed attempts to sort them out with his own lack of knowledge. In contrast to the majority of comedians at this time, Hay actually used very few gags. The standard school room vaudeville act of the time– think of later scenes in the 'OUR GANG' films— contained lots of quick reaction, pun answers to questions. While

Will Hay

Hay did have some typical schoolboy howlers in his act, the comedy came less from these than their deconstruction into finely executed reaction comedy.

A quick Christmas Cracker-standard joke could thus become the basis for a 10 minute routine of wonderfully spiralling frustration and reaction comedy as the class tried to discern if Joan of Arc was Noah's wife, or what (watt) is a unit of electricity . It was less the gags than the spaces between them – a look or sniff here, a wonderfully timed pause there – that created belly laughs.

Edgar Kennedy, himself a denizen of reaction comedy, and Hay's co-star in 'HEY! HEY! USA!' , noted the following:

"Well, it's a swell act, all right. He has that gag, "Moses was the daughter of the Pharaoh's son", and one of the kids asks him to write it on the board, and he writes "Moses was the daughter of —" and then stops there, with his back to the audience and his arm in the air to write and does nothing. It gets the biggest laugh in the whole act. Now, I ask you, why? Would it be funny if he said "I can't spell Pharaoh"? It would mean exactly the same as stopping there. But the way Will does it, the audience gets to use its judgment, and that's why they think it's so good"

It takes a special talent to get laughs with one's back to the audience, and this skill at subtle reaction comedy came with great effort. Like Buster Keaton, Hay applied an engineer's precision to his comedy. "Everything goes under my microscope," he once said, as he would tinker obsessively with the wording of lines or timing of pauses. He was once known to have timed all his laughs wrong, resultantly flopping the act, just to prove his point of the value of timing. A keen comedy theorist, the real Will Hay was actually a very intelligent man who could not have been more unlike his comic character. An astronomer who discovered a white spot on Saturn, he was also a polyglot, trained engineer, and a pilot who gave Amy Johnson one of her first flying lessons! It was, paradoxically, this hyper-intelligence which helped him to fine tune his comedy and refine the subtleties of his buffoonish character, giving extra depth and humanity to what could have been a much more two-dimensional creation.

For, although the on-screen Hay gave the appearance of constantly teetering right at the frontier zone of his minimal competence, he was at least streetwise. Prone to blackmail and corruption, he could also be quickwitted with a muttered quip or a scheme to save himself. Unlike many fellow comedians, he wasn't playing a complete fool, and it was this that gave the character depth that has helped his films to endure. A great example occurs in 'GOOD MORNING BOYS!' he has just found his boys writing horseracing odds on the board, and is just about to rub it off when the school governor arrives. In a tour-de-force, he manages to explain it away and save his skin by incorporating all the contrived names of the horses into a lecture on The Battle of Agincourt.

It took a little while for this full complexity of the character to be developed onscreen, however. Hay's first films transmit his character to the screen cautiously, of his own volition; he shared with many music hall stars the fear of using up material quickly. Rather than filming his schoolmaster act, his first two starring vehicles for British International Pictures were adaptations of respectable Pinero plays. 'THE MAGISTRATE' begat 1934's 'THOSE WERE THE DAYS', while 'DANDY DICK' was allowed to keep its original moniker. Both films now seem rather tame com-

pared to the later gag-packed anarchy of his heyday (Hay-day?), but on their own merits are quite agreeable. It's certainly easy to see what drew him to appear in them, as both feature characters who are outwardly respectable but prone to lapses in judgement and temptation. 'THOSE WERE THE DAYS' is the better of the two films, Hay a kindly Victorian magistrate whose step-son Bobby (an incredibly young John Mills) leads him astray. Bobby is actually a wild young man, but because his mother knocked 10 years off her age when marrying Hay, is forced to play the act of a boy. He convinces the Guv'nor to take a night out to the music hall, which gives the excuse for recreations of lots of music hall acts, including G.H. Elliott, and impersonators of Marie Lloyd and Little Tich. Hay plays his part very well, and playing a more respectable, 'light' comic role of this kind no doubt helped build his screen acting technique.

DANDY DICK sees him in a similar role as a kind hearted vicar who abhors horse racing, but gets mixed up in it when his sister buys a race horse and he badly needs money to repair the church steeple… Again, it's a perfectly good early 30s stage adaptation, lightly entertaining, but lacking the acidity and invention that come to highlight his work later on.

After these films, and a guest spot in the all-star extravaganza 'RADIO PARADE OF 1935', Hay was finally ready to bring his schoolmaster to the screen. Even so, he cautiously adapted to it an already established brand. BOYS WILL BE BOYS features not his traditional St Michael's scholars, but the world of J.B. Morton's 'Narkover', a fictitious public school where most of the pupils are criminally minded. Hay melded the styles together in his own screenplay very successfully indeed, and 'BOYS WILL BE BOYS' presents the 'real' Will Hay to us at last. There's one of his typical extended reaction scenes making gold out of an excruciating pun, as the question "How high is a Chinaman?" spirals into an extended debate before we find out that 'How Hi' is actually his name… There's also one beautiful visual gag that sums up Hay's bluff perfectly. As he is teaching, something flies and hits him on the back of the head. Turning around, he sees a boy fiddling with his catapult, daring a confrontation.

"Stand up!" demands Hay. The boy does so, turning out to be a giant, towering above him. With a sniff, he pauses, then turns to a much smaller boy.

"You stand up," says Hay to the boy, who is very small indeed.

"Don't do it again!" he says, clouting the small boy on the ear.

Such material presents his character as reprehensible, often downright callous, yet we still root for him. Hay was a great admirer of W.C. Fields, and there are certainly parallels between them. Both present essentially unlikeable characters but make us warm to them by presenting a distorted view of our own foibles. It's hard not to feel sympathy for Hay's character, such is the continual extent of his floundering. Yes, he behaves unpleasantly, but mainly out of desperation to save his own skin.

Fields was at his most effective against the backdrop of smallminded, traditional small town America. Hay worked in similarly parochial settings and institutions, whose strachy tradition and stiff upper lips provided a great foil for his slipshod chaos. There was in fact a tangible link between the two men's films: William Beaudine, who directed Fields' 'THE OLD FASHIONED WAY' (1934) worked closely with Will on 'BOYS WILLBE BOYS', and the two pictures that followed, as he was forming his approach to screen comedy. There was also more than a hint of Oliver Hardy's comic philosophy present in Hay's work; in Hardy's words, "There's no one as dumb as a dumb guy who thinks he is smart".

The success of 'BOYS WILL BE BOYS' guaranteed a continuation of his film career. Still cautious about using up his school material, Will sought a fresh setting for his character. He found it as a disreputable lawyer in 'WHERE THERE'S A WILL'. Although a lesser film due to it's rushed production, it contained some fine sequences nonetheless, and proved that the character could work

in another setting. Indeed, the beautiful thing about the schoolmaster character was that it was infinitely transferable to any position of untenable authority. Furthermore, as a master of bluff, it seemed totally natural that his sense of fraudulent self importance could see him bluff his way into any authority position – shyster lawyer, a corruptible station master, fireman or police sergeant – and wreak havoc upon it. The Will Hay films made at Gainsborough studios in the late 30s provided a stream of variations in this line and in the process produced the best British film comedies of the 1930s.

WINDBAG THE SAILOR (love that title!) is the first really successful vehicle to transfer his character to another setting. It also introduces us to his partnership with Moore Marriott and Graham Moffatt, who were to assist Hay brilliantly in transferring his "three ages of ignorance" from sketch to screen. Master of make-up Marriott played the toothless old codger whose incoherence was the butt of most of Hay's frustration; young, cherubically chubby Moffatt was the insolent youth. Again, though, neither character was just two -dimensional. Despite Hay's superiority, Moffatt and Marriott were often devious in getting the better of him.

Co-scripted by Hay and again directed by Beaudine, 'WINDBAG' finds Hay as an old canal barge captain who brags of his imaginary exploits on the high seas ("We were 35 miles off Valpairiso with a cargo of, er, barbed wire and … oranges"). This leads to him being invited to address the local sea scouts in one of his usual incoherent lectures. Overhearing is the crooked Yeats, owner of a broken down old shipping vessel, The Rob Roy. Planning to wreck it, he sees Hay as the perfect cat's paw to take the fall if the ship meets its fate. Yeats publicly offers Hay the command of the ship, knowing that he won't dare turn it down and reveal himself as a fraud. Petrified, Hay enlists the help of his elderly brother in law Harbottle (Moore Marriott) and nephew Albert (Graham Moffatt) to bring him a telegram with news that he cannot sail. Albert & Harbottle however, fancy a sea voyage, and instead of bringing the telegram, stow away with him.

Hay's ignorance soon becomes glaringly obvious, as he spends most of the journey being seasick. Believing he is bound for Norway, he is oblivious to the fact that the crew are secretly steering the ship to the South Seas to wreck it. When he finally cottons on to the fact that the weather is becoming somewhat tropical, he, Albert and Harbottle attempt to use their navigation skills to work out where their position might be.

Albert: We need to work out our latitude and longitude

Hay: Well how do we do that?

Albert: We need to find where the sun is.

Harbottle: That's easy. It's up there.

Hay: Ah, there we go. So it's 1512 divided by the sun up there…

Albert: How can we divide by the sun up there?

Hay: Er, well, I don't care how you do it, one way's as good as another… Tell you what, it's half past 4; let's multiply by 430. So that's 1512 x 430.

Albert 16,4800012.

Hay: Cor, haven't we come a long way? Alright, gimme that tape measure (wrapping the tape measure 3 times around the globe) Well, according to that, we're about 3 ½ miles from Birmingham…

This wonderful scene represents the moment when Hay's schoolroom idiom crystallises in other contexts. From now on there would be no turning back.

Ultimately, Hay gets wise to the wrecking scheme, and when he tries to assert his authority, the crew hold a mutiny, From now on it's equal parts 'MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY' and a riff on Keaton's 'THE NAVIGATOR' as Hay, Moffatt and Marriott find themselves drifting towards a cannibal isle. With the aid of their radio set, which they pass off as a god, "Voice-in-box", they manage to survive, and make it back to the still-drifting ship, and sail back home victoriously.

The next film, 'GOOD MORNING BOYS' , didn't have a part for Moore Marriott, but retained Graham Moffatt as chief prankster in Hay's class as he returned to the classroom setting. It also saw the addition of the final parts of the team that would make Hay's best films: screenwriting team Val Guest, Marriott Edgar and J.O.C. Orton. As headmaster Dr Benjamin Twist, Hay is again at the mercy of his boys, as well as a pompous school governor out to have him fired. In order to save his job, the boys are required to enter an inter-schools French examination, his fate resting on their results. After accidentally coming into possession of the exam papers, the boys persuade the weak-willed Twist to let them cheat, leading to a hilarious examination where Hay and the boys contrive to cheat, simultaneously nobbling their swotty young rivals (including a very young Charles Hawtrey). Coming out on top, the boys are rewarded with a trip to Paris, where they get mixed up with the theft of the Mona Lisa. The lack of Marriott has sometimes seen this film skimmed over, but it's excellent all the way through, containing many of his funniest schoolroom scenes. As well as the above mentioned scenes, there is the "What is a unit of electricity?" routine, and the whole thing zips and zings with one liners.

Even better was the next film, which saw the return of Moore Marriott. 'OH! MR PORTER' was destined to become the most fondly remembered of all Hay's films, a classic voted into more than one 'Top 100' film lists. It was simply one of those glorious instances of everything coming together. Hay, Moffatt and Marriott are together again, all on top form. The story, adopted from Arnold Ridley's play 'THE GHOST TRAIN', contains mystery and suspense to enhance the comedy, and the screenplay by Guest, Edgar, Orton and Frank Launder is simply brilliant. Add in a dose of nostalgia courtesy of steam trains and the bucolic pre-war English countryside location shooting, and you have an eternally wonderful film.

Hay's officious, bluffing bumbler has an ideal role as William Porter, a lowly wheeltapper, who has tapped steam engine's wheels for 40 years without a clue why he is doing it. His sister, wife of the railway's managing director, is appalled to find him in such menial work and insists that Hubby pulls rank to get him a better position. To get Porter out of his hair, he posts him to Buggleskelly in Northern Ireland, a remote station where trains only stop on Tuesdays and all previous incumbents have gone mad or died!

Arriving at Buggleskelly in torrential rain, Hay is told the tale of One-eyed Joe, a phantom miller who haunts the railway line that killed him. Brushing the story aside as superstitious nonsense, he arrives at the tatty station to a less than enthusiastic response ("Next train's gone!") from porters Albert and Harbottle. They are less than keen on his officious manner, which only worsens

when he finds that they are slackers who have been living on a subsistence diet found in railway parcels! Setting about brightening the halt, Hay also embarks on a task to make more trains stop, including running his own excursion train. Business is non-existent, except from a mysterious one-eyed stranger, who summons Porter into a darkened room and buys all the tickets, with the caveat that the train must run at 6a.m.

On the day of the excursion, Porter dispatches the train for the stranger and his passengers, only to find that it never reaches the signal box. As no-one else has even seen the train, Albert and Harbottle believe he is losing his mind like all the previous incumbents. Not to be outdone, Hay forces them on a mission to find his train, with the assistance of the aged shunting engine Gladstone. Noticing an abandoned loop line beneath the haunted mill, Porter explores, and in a tunnel, they find the stolen train. It turns out that 'Joe' is head of a gun-running gang, using the mill's reputation to keep locals away while they use it as a base to ship guns across the border to Eire using the loop line. Caught snooping around, they are locked in the windmill, but escape by jumping from its sails; making it back to Gladstone, they couple up to the stolen train, and take off towards Belfast. Thus begins a fantastic climatic scene of the gunrunners trying to stop the train as they speed toward the end of the line. A message in a bottle brings the police just as they crash into the buffer stops. Congratulations are offered all round, but it has all been too much for Gladstone, who explodes. The trio doff their caps as the last post plays.

A synopsis alone cannot capture the humour and vintage charm of 'OH! MR PORTER'. Virtually every line is a gag, there are some wonderfully colourful supporting characters (most memorably Dave O' Toole's postman who follows Hay's every move with a gleeful "You're wasting your time!"). Even Gladstone the engine seems to take on a life of its own! There is also an abundance of simply terrific setpieces. As the bungler who finds himself suddenly in control, Hay gets ample opportunity to show off the comically imperious nature of his character, only to have his ambitions thwarted by the disdain of others and his own eternal incompetence. So, we get some fine scenes descended from his classroom antics, but applied gloriously to a new context. There is his insistence that the express train stops, just so the guard can make his acquantance, his dictatorial efforts to brighten the station, sabotaged by Albert and Harbottle, and his feeble attempt to use a selection of garbled railway bylaws to explain to a customer how the pig in transit ended up as bacon for the station staff…

Best of all is another mathematical calculation scene, as the trio try to ascertain the effect of British Summer Time on the train timetable. Their excursion carriage is blocking the main line and the express is due any minute. A flash of inspiration arrives in the form of a telegram:

PORTER: "On April 19th, summertime will begin. Clocks should be adjusted accordingly. To adjust the service to the new time, the 11 o'clock express on this day will run at 12 o'clock summertime." Well, what are we hurrying for?

Will Hay

ALBERT: How do you make out we've got two hours?

PORTER:Well, if we put the clocks back an hour, the train's an hour late, that's two hours isn't it?

ALBERT: Nah, you put the clocks forward and the train back.

PORTER: Well, what do we get then?

ALBERT: You got the express coming any minute.

PORTER: What you talking about? Listen, if a train's late, how can it be coming now?

HARBOTTLE: It's summertime.

PORTER: Summertime! The old fool's potty. Summertime or wintertime, if a train's late, it's late!

ALBERT: Yes, but you put the clocks forward.

PORTER: But if the clocks go foward, then the train's already gone!

HARBOTTLE: No, no, you put the clocks back.

PORTER: Of course you do. You lengthen the day by taking an hour off the end, and sticking it on the beginning

HARBOTTLE: No, you take an hour off the beginning and stick it on the end.

PORTER: That's wintertime.

ALBERT: No, wintertime, you put it back!

PORTER: Well, that's what I said!

After some more confusion, Porter puts his foot down. Of course he's right. He knows what he's talking about. The train won't be here for another two hours. Of course, at exactly the moment he has said this, a whistle is heard, along comes a train, and the carriage is smasshed to smithereens. Will's summation of the situation?

"That's your fault. I said we should have put the clocks forward!"

'OH MR PORTER' straddles a perfect line between cosy nostalgia for the pre-war rural England and old railways, and a more modern irreverence in character. The dialogue, too, has a wonderfully idiot savant logic to it, reminiscent of the Marx Brothers that helps the films carry much more bite than the average British comedy of the 1930s. It formed a template for another four films showcasing the "three idiots", as they were fondly called by Val Guest.

Carried along to the other films were the settings of disreputable service employment – fire service, police force, colonial rule, prison service. There would always be some criminals out to take advantage of their ignorance, too. More specifically, the films would often contain some sort of antiquated prop of the Gladstone ilk – an old steamer or antique fire engine – and the mathematical calculation sequences were always worked into the plot. There's no denying that the Hay-Moffatt-Marriot films were formula film-making. However, the talents of all involved were such, and the variations so rich, that they remained a consistently brilliant set of films.

'CONVICT 99', the follow up to 'OH MR PORTER', rose to the challenge and was very nearly as good. This time, Hay was again a schoolmaster, down on his uppers, who is elected governor of a prison through a clerical error. After initially being mistaken for an inmate and forced to share a cell with ancient convict Jerry the Mole (Marriott), who has been trying to escape for 40 years. When the mistake is finally sorted out, he is installed as governor and learns of the error. After seeing his new salary, he decides not to mention it; after all, how hard can running a prison be…? Applying his schoolmaster's behaviour management techniques, Hay soon has the inmates walk-

ing all over him, forming their own committee, having baths and being served hot drinks in sun loungers all day. It doesn't take long for the villainous Schlesinger and his girlfriend to take advantage of his weakness to gain a forged cheque for the entire funds of the prison trust. Hay, the other convicts and prison warder Albert (Moffatt) break jail to track Schlesinger back to his Limehouse lair, and to sneak into the bank and put the forged cheque back in Hay's deposit box. All ends happily, and Hay's techniques are hailed as a giant leap in prison reform.

Perhaps the most satirical of Hay's films, CONVICT 99 points to another of the reasons that the films have endured so well: they pull no punches in laying waste to British institutions at a time when many doffed their caps reverently. Their anti-authoritarian tone chimes very well with our cynical modern existence, in which politicians and public figures constantly disgrace themselves and blunder through. While the public school world the schoolmaster inhabited has mainly gone, Britain's educational climate is now a floundering one, full of endless paper trails and performance management; a perfect setting for Dr Twist's incompetence and obfuscation, surely! Indeed, it would be very easy to see Hay and co existing in many settings in the current day, not just in education, but perhaps in the world of politics, or as the disreputable clergy of a rural parish. In fact, they could neatly slot into 'YES MINISTER' or 'FATHER TED', two sitcoms that surely bore their influence.

'OLD BONES OF THE RIVER' maintained the satirical vibe, sending up the missionary movement as Hay's schoolmaster went to colonial Africa to 'civilise the natives'. This is a film that can only be seen at a disadvantage now; the context leads to some very dated and unfortunate racial moments. However, it must be said that the wince-inducing moments arise more from the 'serious' plot footage. Hay's incompetence and utter unsuitability to 'civilising' the natives – planning to hire a bicycle to cycle across 500 miles of African jungle; combining his mortar board and gown with tropical shorts; trying to apply a taxation system to a tribe who are much smarter than him and bamboozle him – are actually damning satirical indictments of the British Empire's hopelessly jingoistic techniques of 'civilising' indigenous people. Moffatt and Marriott are along for the ride on the ancient steamboat Zaire, a variation on Gladstone, hindering Hay's attempts to collect taxes. There's also this wonderful exchange, as Hay produces his own tax return to explain the system:

Moffatt: Don't earn very much, do you?

Hay: I don't want any impudence from you. Anyway, that's nothing to do with what I earn… That's what I declare.

Perhaps the ideal line to sum up Hay's shifty character.

If parts of 'OLD BONES' and 'CONVICT 99' owed a debt to the trio's adventures in Bugglesskelly, ASK A POLICEMAN pillages it outright. Change uniforms from railway to police, villainous gun runners to smugglers, the tale of a ghostly miller to a headless horseman, and the speeding train finale for a bus chase, and Bob's your fictitious avuncular relative, OH MR PORTER is magically transformed into ASK A POLICEMAN. Controversially, it might actually be the funnier film, full of great scenes and dialogue.

Despite the quality of the films, Hay couldn't help but feel that the formulaic nature was getting a bit much. He had already protested and made one film without Moffatt and Marriott, 1938's 'HEY! HEY! USA!'. That this was a flop is less to do with Hay's shortcomings

than its rather desperate attempts to make him appeal to the American market. As a porter who becomes an accidental transatlantic stowaway and falls in with a dumb gangster (Edgar Kennedy) and the kidnapping of a young heir, he is trapped into an all too phony version of Chicago clearly the invention of people who have never visited but are basing it all on a viewing of 'SCARFACE'. Hay and Kennedy worked well together though, but a far better solution would have been to incorporate the American element into Hay's usual idiom, perhaps by having Kennedy as a dumb tourist, or the young heir as a pupil at St Michael's. As it is, 'HEY! HEY! USA! is a curio, but lacking in the individuality and charm of his other films.

Gainsborough pictures were understandably loathe to break up such a successful formula, but Hay was adamant that he wanted to try new things, and announced his notice on completion of 'WHERE'S THAT FIRE?'. The last of the films featuring 'the three idiots', it features them in yet another decrepit station; this time a fire station. Never mind the fire; it was for many years a case of 'WHERE'S THAT FILM?', as no copies were known to survive until one turned up at the BBC in the 1970s. Interviewed on the set of the film, Hay had noted the formulaic nature of his recent films:

"Firemen this week aren't we? We've been through all the uniforms in turn, and its sometimes hard to remember if we're policemen or firemen or what!" 'WHERE'S THAT FIRE?' does justify Hay's feelings somewhat, having a feeling of overfamiliarity. Just a notch below the sustained quality of 'ASK A POLICEMAN' and 'OH! MR PORTER', it does, however, also contain some of their very best scenes. Most celebrated of all is that involving the trio's incompetent efforts to erect a fireman's pole. Perhaps the most Marx Brothers-influenced sequence they ever did, this is actually based on a sequence from the Jack Hulbert vehicle 'JACK'S THE BOY' (1932), directed by silent comedian Walter Forde. Hay's version far surpasses the earlier one and is a masterpiece of escalating calamity. Realising the pole is the wrong way round, the trio take it out into the street to turn it around, jamming up traffic; their attempts to extricate the pole, while avoiding the helpful suggestions of schoolboy Charles Hawtrey, and the intrusions of a host of other characters, is a brilliantly built sequence.

Despite the excellence of the material, it was getting rather too slapstick for Hay's liking, and his mind was made up. He moved over to Ealing Studios in 1941, leaving Moffatt, Marriott and the team of scriptwriters behind. The one constant would be director Marcel Varnel, who directed his first Ealing film. Hay's films for Ealing don't exactly have a poor reputation amongst his admirers – he never made a bad film, as such – but they are certainly considered lesser efforts than his magnificent Gainsborough work. This is true, but all of them remain solid comedy vehicles that would have been career highlights for many performers, and one ranks amongst his very best.

While the loss of Marriot and Moffatt is certainly noticeable, the deficit was made up by some other excellent foils, showing that Hay's decision to work without them was not just egotism but a desire to mine fresh veins of comedy. He clearly recognised that he needed foils to enhance his own comedy, and his first Ealing film provides two brilliant ones in blithering Etonian Claude Hulbert and smart-alec Charles Hawtrey. 'THE GHOST OF ST MICHAEL'S' features Hay joining the staff of St Michael's boarding school, which for the duration of the war has been evacuated to a castle on the Isle of Skye. The castle is allegedly haunted, and caretaker John Laurie delights in telling all and sundry how the phantom pipes will be heard just before a death (his role as Private Fraser in 'DAD'S ARMY' was inspired by this film). Hay soon falls victim to the pranks of precocious Hawtrey and his classmates, and also has an enemy in another teacher, Humphries, who has worked with him in the past and relishes in tales of Hay's incompetence. However, both the headmaster and Humphries are soon found dead and suspicion falls on Hay. It's up to him, with the dubious aid of Hulbert and Hawtrey, to clear his name and get to the bottom of the 'phantom pipes' mystery once and for all!

THE GHOST OF ST MICHAEL'S' certainly contains enough classic Hay elements – an apocryphal legend à la the phantom miller, a schoolroom setting— but presents a different, and very funny, version of his eternal trio, giving his film career a shot in the arm and starting his Ealing work in fine style.

The next couple of films didn't quite match up to this high standard. THE BLACK SHEEP OF WHITEHALL has lots of positives; for one, John Mills returns as an excellent foil for Hay as the only student for his awful correspondence college. Mills is unsatisfied with Hay's incompetence and refuses to pay; Hay tracks him down to his Whitehall job where he is accidentally confused with a visiting professor advising the government on South American trade. Put live on to the radio, he bluffs a wonderfully garbled interview about imports and exports. The real professor is clearly spooked by the mix up and Mills smells a rat; he and Hay set out to prove that the Professor is also a phony. Using a series of disguises, they discover he is actually an impostor and track down a ring of fifth columnists out to sabotage a government trade deal vital to the war. There are lots of marvellous scenes, but inspiration flags in the second half as the film descends into slapstick and silliness more in the George Formby line.

I have a personal theory that the more Nazi plots are put into a comedy film, the less funny it becomes. Hay's next, 'THE GOOSE STEPS OUT' is certainly evidence for that; it's my candidate for his weakest film. Originally intended as a short propaganda film, it grew to be a feature length comedy; both patriotism and padding show accordingly. This time he's the double of a German agent, and when the secret service get wind of him, he is parachuted into Germany to infiltrate a school for training enemy agents. It may be weak as a whole, but this film does have some glorious moments: a beautiful scene (sadly missing from the print on DVD) dealing with the intricacies of pronouncing British place names, and best of all, a scene where Hay tricks the whole class into giving a two-fingered salute (and not Churchill's version!) to a portrait of Hitler! These highlights are too few and far between, though. Hurting the film most of all is its loudness. Occasionally, Hay's barking of orders could push his comedy to be a little too shrill, but here he seems to yell every line. Top it all off with a loud, cramped runaway aeroplane sequence (cf Laurel & Hardy's 'THE FLYING DEUCES') and you've got a film far less likeable, original or funny than any he had previously made.

While the need for comics to engage in propaganda to boost morale in dark times is understandable, it doesn't make for the best comedy. Hay's character was most suited to fighting small battles over insolence in the classroom, against pompous school governors or small time crooks, than against the might of the whole German army. It's significant that his more low-key propaganda short 'GO TO BLAZES', where he incompetently shows how not to put out a fire bomb, comes off much better, and even more significant that his best Ealing film specifically eschews mention of wartime.

MY LEARNED FRIEND (1943) begins with a prominent title informing us that the setting is 'LONDON – PRE-WAR'. It sees the return of dithering Claude Hulbert as Babbington, a hopeless trainee barrister who is given one last chance to redeem himself. A fellow named Fitch has been held on a charge of writing 23 letters to gain money under false pretences; all Babbington has to do is have him convicted. Fitch is, of course, Hay. More dishonest and shifty than ever, his character has a newfound confidence as he proceeds to reel out a sly excuse to explain away each begging letter, baffling Babbington:

FITCH: I take it the first letter is dismissed, your worship?

JUDGE: It is. Leaving a mere 22…

BABBINGTON: "Madam,I have no husband…"

FITCH: Well, I suppose you're going to argue with that?

BABBINGTON: "…and every spare penny I have goes on my three little tots." Can you honestly tell the court that you have three little tots?

FITCH: I can. Every night in The Goat & Compasses. Three tots of rum. Is that 21 left, your worship?

BABBINGTON: Well, how about this? "I am an orphan"

FITCH: Well, so I am.

BABBINGTON: But you can't possibly call yourself an orphan at your age.

FITCH: Why not? It's people my age who are more likely to be orphans.

BABBINGTON: But you're not often called orphans. It's only the very young who are not orphaned so often…

FITCH: Er, say again?

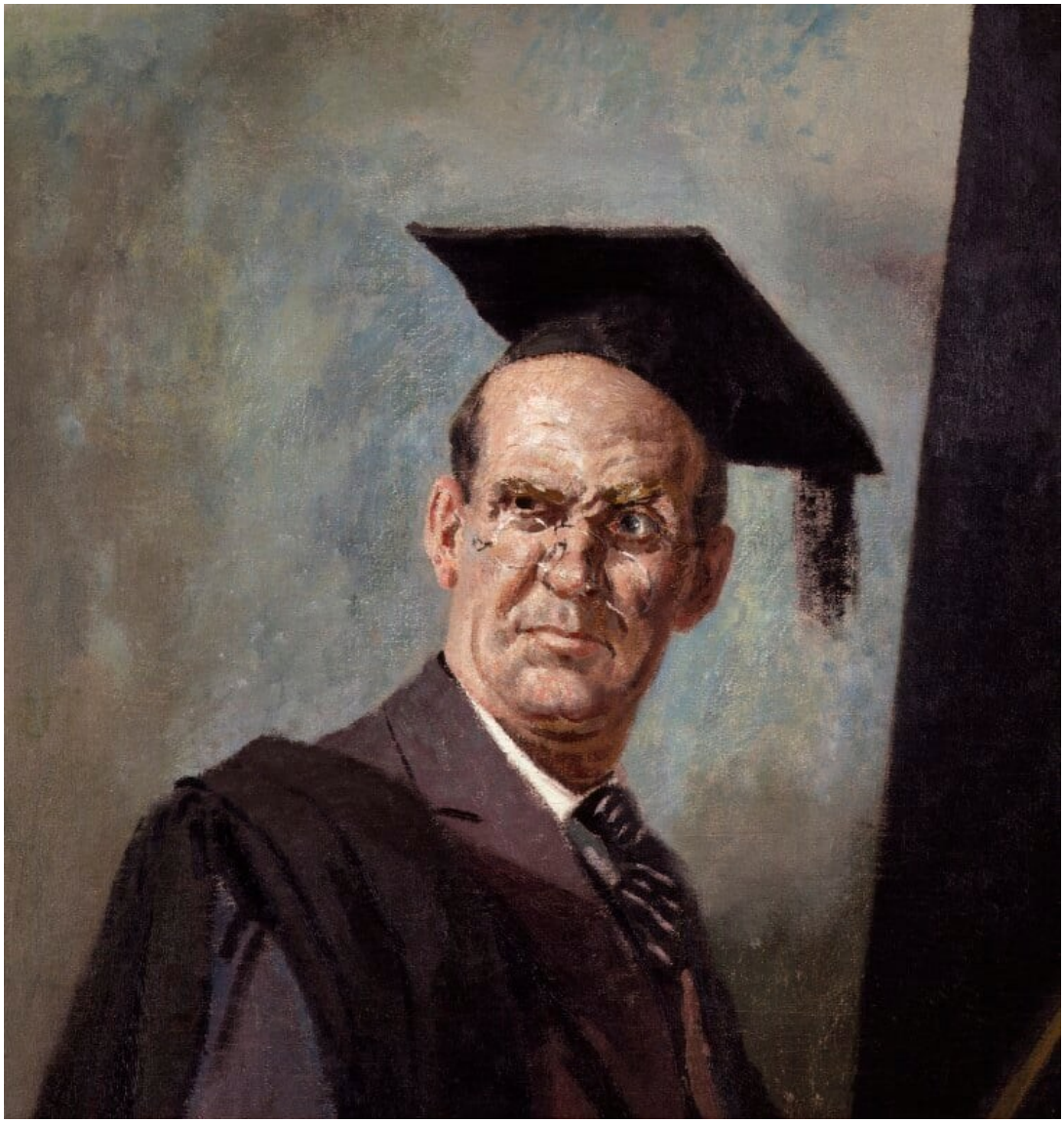
Fitch proceeds to defeat Babbington on every count, and the case is thrown out. They bump into each other later in a bar, and Fitch offers his commiserations, explaining that he used to be barrister ("Until I got accused of some nonsense about trying to bribe a witness. Well, I couldn't be bothered to argue the case, so I just disbarred myself…"). Sensing a cash cow, Fitch persuades Babbington to team up. They have their first case very soon, when Grimshaw, an unhinged former client of Fitch's appears. Menacingly, he tells them of his plot to kill off everyone involved in his trial, culminating with Fitch himself… "6 little dramas of retribution, all beautifully staged". It soon becomes clear that he means it, and the hapless pair embark on a race to a) tip off the other victims, b) persuade the police of their unlikely tale and c) stop the other murders so that Fitch will stay at the bottom of his list! The rest of the film is a wonderfully dark and cynical game of cat and mouse, that takes our heroes to a variety of improbable settings: an east-end dive bar, a home for mental patients, onstage at a pantomime, and finally to dangle from the hands of Big Ben as Grimshaw tries to bump off the whole House of Lords!

MY LEARNED FRIEND is simply a tour de force. Hay and Hulbert are brilliant together, the script is packed with gags and incident, and lightning-paced. While the war is absent from the film, its impact is noticeable in the casual attitude to murder soon to be seen in Chaplin's 'MONSIEUR VERDOUX' and Ealing's own KIND HEARTS & CORONETS'.

Different in tone to all Hay's other films, MY LEARNED FRIEND could have been the start of a profitable new direction, but it was to be his last. During filming, Hay was diagnosed with cancer and, though he was to have successful surgery, his health entered a terminal decline which reduced his activities to a few radio appearances. Though he harboured hopes of moving into producing or directing ("I could sit in a chair with my stick!") A series of strokes put paid to this idea, and he passed away on Easter Monday, 1949, aged just 60. It had always been ironic that such an intelligent man had played an incompetent teacher, and now in one final irony, he was dead at the scholastic retirement age.

Yet, the antics of Hay as Dr Benjamin Twist, William Porter and all his other creations live on. The films, though taken for granted somewhat, endure as wonderful comedies, certainly the best produced in England during the 1930s and early 1940s. Hay's comedy was to influence Tony

Hancock, Dad's Army and many other beloved creations. Our modern world of corruption, gerrymandering, incompetence and red tape is all the poorer without his being here to present his own skewed, comic take on it. Will Hay was one of a kind, and his films are to be cherished.



Shaw House & Donnington Castle

https://www.westberkshireheritage.org/shaw-house

Shaw House is an Elizabethan mansion in Shaw near Newbury, Berkshire, UK. The house is Grade I listed and its park and gardens are Grade II. The house is an early example of symmetrical H-plan architecture.

The manor house of Shaw, Shaw House was built by the wealthy cloth merchant, Thomas Dolman, and completed in 1581. It is famous for its reputation as King Charles I's headquarters during the Second Battle of Newbury. However recent research has proved that, despite the house being at the centre of the fighting, the King never went to it. Other royals have visited, most notably Elizabeth I. In the 1720s, it was acquired by the flamboyant James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos. Although it was not the principal residence of the Duke, the family evidently spent some time in the area and the second Duke bought a wife at a sale in Newbury.

After the first Duke's death in 1744 the dowager duchess lived at Shaw House till her death in 1750. Her step-son sold the property soon afterwards to the Andrews family. It was the childhood home of the historian James Pettit Andrews. For many years it was also a school.

The house is currently owned and managed by West Berkshire Council as a conference venue and public attraction.

Following a major restoration Shaw House opened to the public in 2008. It is also a conference venue and home to West Berkshire's register office. Work began in 2005 after the mansion was awarded more than £4 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. English Heritage and Vodafone also contributed to the project.

Class dismissed!

Donnington Castle is a ruined medieval castle, situated in the small village of Donnington, just north of the town of Newbury in the English county of Berkshire. It was founded by Sir Richard Abberbury the Elder in 1386 and was bought by Thomas Chaucer before the castle was taken under royal control during the Tudor period. During the First English Civil War the castle was held by the royalist Sir John Boys and withstood an 18-month siege; after the garrison eventually surrendered, Parliament voted to demolish Donnington Castle in 1646. Only the gatehouse survives. The site is a scheduled monument under the care of English Heritage.

The manor of Donnington had been owned by the Abberbury family since 1292, Donnington Castle was built by its original owner, Sir Richard Abberbury the Elder, under a licence granted by Richard II in 1386. The surviving castle gatehouse dates from this time. In 1398, the castle was sold to Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer, as a residence for his daughter Alice, who later became Duchess of Suffolk. The Duke of Suffolk William De La Pole made Donnington his occasional residence, and considerably enlarged the buildings.

This family later fell out with the Tudor monarchs, and the castle became a royal property. In 1514 it was given to Charles Brandon, 1st Duke of Suffolk. Though Brandon appears to have stayed at the Donnington Castle in 1516, by the time the castle and manor returned to the Crown in 1535 the structure was in a state of decay. King Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Queen Elizabeth I visited Donnington Castle, in 1539, 1552, and 1568 respectively.

In 1590 Elizabeth I granted keepership to Elizabeth Cooke (Lady Russell), the first woman to hold such a title in England. In 1600, Elizabeth I gave the castle and surrounding manor to Charles Howard, 1st Earl of Nottingham. Howard took possession in September 1603 and Russell disputed his rights. By the time the English Civil War broke out in 1643, the castle was owned by the Parliamentarian John Packer family but after the First Battle of Newbury it was taken for the King, Charles I, and held by Sir John Boys. They quickly enhanced the castle's defences by adding earthworks in a star shape to provide gun emplacements. Parliamentarians laid siege to the castle

in October 1644 and the garrison held out for 18 months. With permission from the king, Boys surrendered the castle in April 1646 and was allowed to leave with all his men.

In 1646 Parliament voted to demolish the castle; only the gatehouse was left standing though the 17th-century earthworks can still be seen. The castle is now in the care of English Heritage and is a scheduled ancient monument number 1007926.

The castle stayed in the Packer family until the mid 18th century, when Robert Packer married Mary Winchcombe, and the property passed to the Winchcombe family. From 1833 to 1881 the manor and castle was owned by Winchcombe Henry Hartley.

Donnington Castle was originally built in a roughly rectangular form, though the west facade projected outwards irregularly. It was enclosed by a curtain wall, with a round tower at each of the four corners. Roughly halfway along the two walls running from west to east were two square towers. The courtyard enclosed by the curtain walls would probably have contained a hall, kitchens, and accommodation for guests. Measured from the inner sides of the curtain walls, the courtyard measured 67 feet (20 m) north to south and 108 ft (33 m) east to west.

During the Civil War star-shaped defences were built around the castle to facilitate gun emplacements. Only the gatehouse, crested by battlements, survived the castle's destruction in 1646; standing three storeys high, it measures 17.5 by 11.75 feet (5.33 by 3.58 m) internally. Modern walls standing 0.5 metres (1 ft 8 in) high outline the original layout of the demolished castle. The star-shaped earthworks added during the Civil War are still visible, surviving to a height of 1.7 m (5 ft 7 in).

Donnington Castle's close association with the English monarchy dates back to its construction under a licence granted by Richard II to the Adderbury family. Although the castle changed hands several times, it eventually became the property of the royal family, and consequently, many notable figures closely linked to the English monarchy visited Donnington.

Among the most prominent residents of Donnington were Sir Richard Abberbury the Elder, the original owner of the castle and Chamberlain to Anne of Bohemia; Alice Chaucer, Duchess of Suffolk; William de la Pole, 1st Duke of Suffolk; Charles Brandon, 1st Duke of Suffolk and 1st Viscount Lisle; King Henry VIII; King Edward VI; Queen Elizabeth I; Elizabeth Cooke, Lady Russell; Charles Howard, 1st Earl of Nottingham; John Packer, Parliamentarian, and secretary to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Sir John Boys, the Royalist Governor of Donnington Castle; and Robert Packer, a politician and Member of Parliament.

Donnington Castle appears in the "Little Girl Lost" episode of The Saint, first broadcast on 2 December 1966.

The castle appeared in the Children's Film Foundation feature A Hitch in Time (1978), starring Patrick Troughton.

The twin-towered gatehouse is depicted on the cover of the Tenpole Tudor compilation album The Best of Tenpole Tudor: Swords of a Thousand Men (2001).

Shaw House & Donnington Castle

SudoKu Puzzle 1

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3	6	4	9	7	5						4
6	9		2	1	4	5	8	7			6
1		2		5	7	4	9	6		1	
4	7	5	8	6	9		3	2		4	7
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5		8	7	3		6	1	9		8	5
3	2	4	1		8	9	6	5			4
	6	1	9		5		7	4		6	8
	5	7		4		8	2				9

SudoKu Puzzle 2

2				3	7	4	9	
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	8			4	6			5
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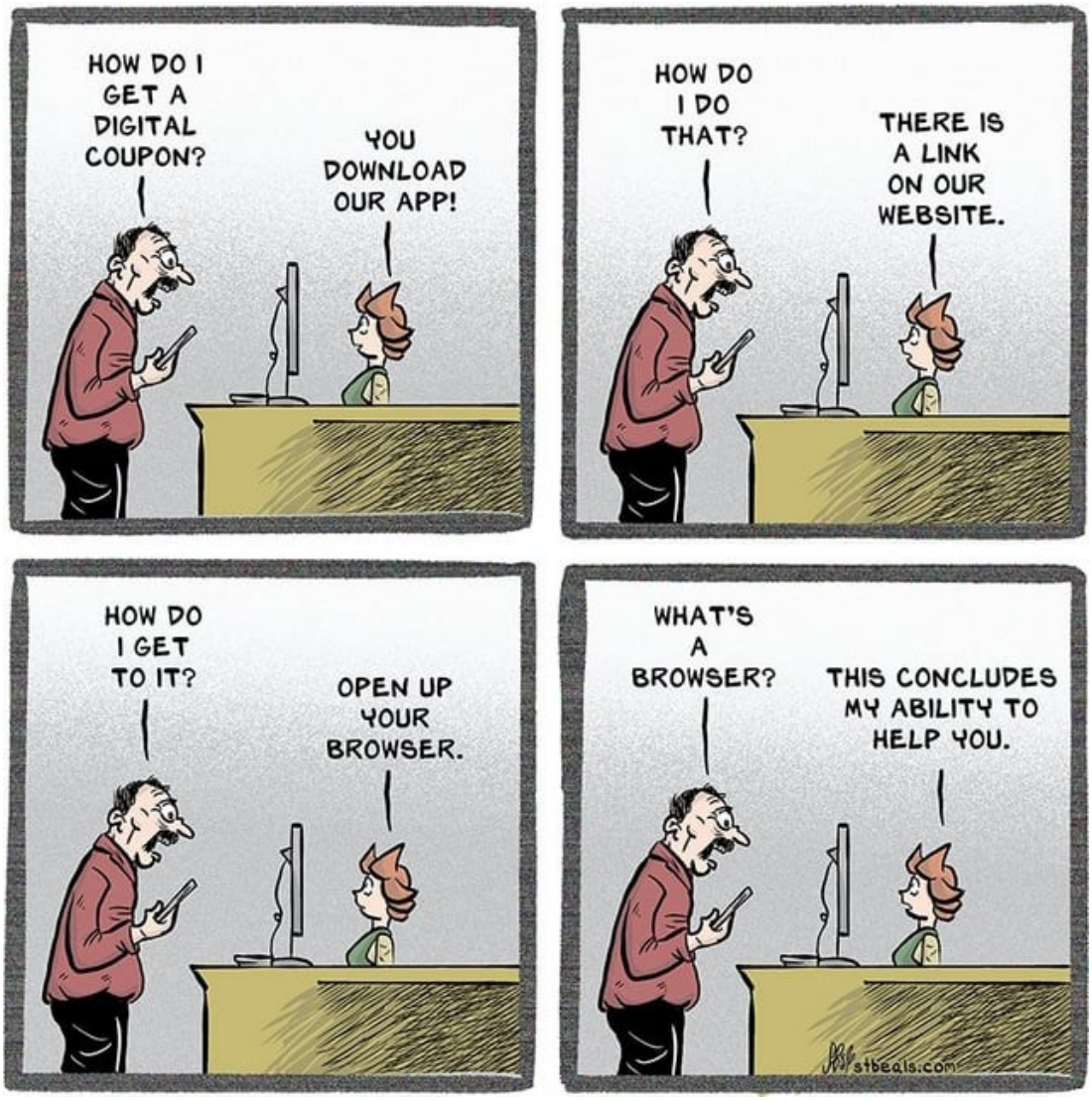
8			7		3		4	
	3	8		7			6	
6				1		9		
			6	9			8	7

"What? You've already tried turning it off and on again?... Well hey, we have vacancies here in tech support if you're interested."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