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# If We Had Our Way

UK : 1946 : dir. : John Baxter Productions : ? min  
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:  
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Peter Bull (?)

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*Ablutions after a hard day's harvesting for three AWOL city lads. Dick went on to become a Soho masseur, Harry a London vet, and Tom a dealer in second hand gypsy caravans. Source for all stills: Junior Film Annual 1946-47*

Junior Film Annual 1946-47 synopsis in story form:

“Tom, Dick and. Harry were three boys who wanted to get out of London into the open countryside where they were sure all kinds of splendid adventures were to be found. They met a grumpy old carrier who was setting off for the West Country and

begged him to take them along with his horse and cart. He didn't want them to come at all, but somehow or other they managed to persuade him into doing it...

Sitting snugly in the cart they went out past Buckingham Palace and through shabby, blitzed south-west London to the fresh country round Virginia Water and the



*Their Adventure was all going swimmingly, until the mysterious old carter began to wobble on about his fondness for leather harnesses. "Ooh I say!" gasped Tom, "That sounds positively beastly!"*

pinewoods of Sunningdale. The carrier, as they soon found out, was a mysterious character. It was plain that he was on some sort of quest, but he became very angry indeed when they showed too much interest in his affairs. They came to a fairground, and the old man announced that they could go no farther. He had a job of work to do, and he didn't want the boys hanging about to watch him.

Regretfully, the boys said goodbye to him and wandered round the fair watching the people enjoying the swings and roundabouts. They came on a showman ill-treating a dog. By a smart piece of work they released it. They had to run away afterwards, and there was no one to help them but the gruff old carrier. And, when he took to the road again, the boys were back with him – and the dog as well.

The carrier's behaviour grew more and more mysterious. One night he took the boys into the grounds of a big house where, through the window, they could see a very grand party going on. But their free entertainment was cut short for the old man appeared suddenly and told them to run for it. Later, when sounds of pursuit had died down, they asked him what was going on, but he refused to give any explanation.

Thereafter he kept going off by himself at intervals, and once they followed him. He led them to a lonely hut on the cliffside where he held a very strange conversation, which they could make no sense of, with a fisherman called Joe.

But, in spite of all appearances, they felt that the carrier was a decent old fellow at heart and that he was doing nothing Wrong himself, no matter what shady enterprise he was mixed up in. Meanwhile they were happy enough enjoying their free new life: the beauty of the trees and cliffs, the freedom from the man-made noises of big cities, the joy of sleeping under the stars. When the chance came to help with the harvest they seized it gladly.

It was after the harvest that things began to happen in a way that made them think their past adventures were poor stuff indeed. They were invited to tea at the big house by Mr. Jennings, who had noted with approval their good work in the fields. Looking almost unrecognisably tidy and clean, they went to the big house where an enormous tea awaited them. But before they had a chance to eat anything, Mr. Jennings started asking them all sorts of peculiar questions about their travels. Tom got the idea that they were being pumped about the old carrier and signalled his idea to the others. The three boys immediately became completely dumb, though they eyed the wonderful tea hungrily.

Their host's manner changed. He said that, if they refused to answer his questions, he would phone the police and give them in charge for stealing the dog from the fairground. But at that moment the old carrier entered through the window. Now the whole story came out. The old man's real name was Martin. His

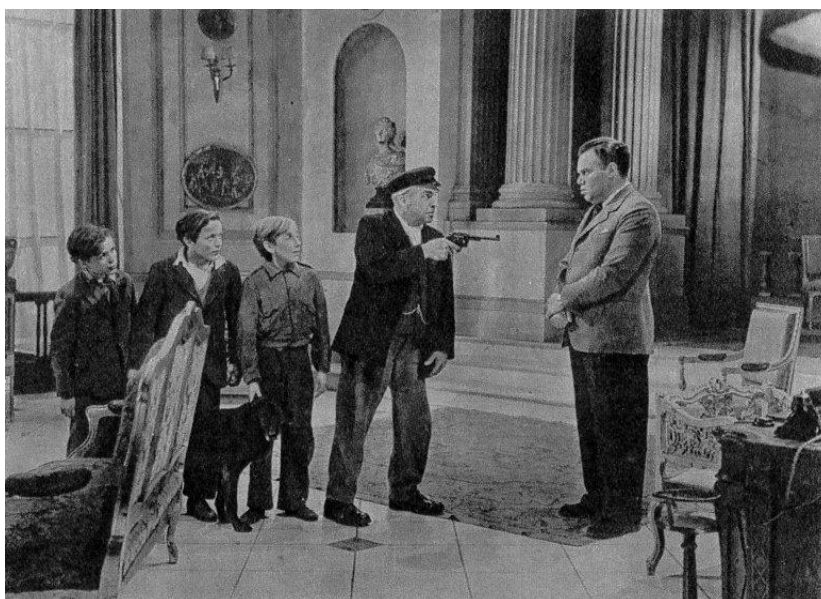


*Top left: What holiday in the country would be complete without spying on the gentry?*

*Top right: Dick was a bit of a caution with Harry's catapult, but he demonstrated how resistance fighters used them during the war for bringing down Stukas...*

*Left: The harvesting went like a treat until somebody accidentally pitchforked the dog...*

*Bottom: "You old fool" sneers the villainous Jennings, "Aristotle Onassis made his fortune putting leaky ships to sea !"*





*Post war austerity be damned, as our heroes tuck in to the trifles, jellies and other nutritious treats. "But we didn't actually DO anything very adventurous, did we?" muses Tom. "What did you expect?" snorts Harry, "Jurassic Park?"*

son had been killed when a vessel belonging to Jennings had been lost through being sent out by the owner in foul weather. He had sworn to hunt Jennings down, and all the mysterious things he had been doing had been to that end.

Jennings now tried to buy his way out. Mr. Martin said the law must deal with him, but he would be given a chance to run for it if he would pay £5,000 to the relatives of the sailors who had been lost in his ship. Jennings was not finished yet, however. He drew a revolver and threatened Mr. Martin. But he had not reckoned with Harry, who was a dead shot with his catapult. Harry scored a bullseye, and the tables were neatly turned.

Now only one thing remained to cap the adventure. The wonderful tea that had been laid out to tempt them was still

standing there uneaten. Mr. Martin suggested that they might as well have what they had been invited there to have, so they all pulled chairs up to the table."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "The Moving Picture Boy", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. The identities of Tom Dick and Harry are unknown. One of them vaguely resembles Hughie Green ("**MIDSHIPMAN EASY**"), but the period is wrong, and by this age he was already a radio star, so a production of this kind would have been beneath his dignity.

The naïveté has its own beguiling charm from this distance in time, but viewed more acerbically it is, like most British children's films of the period, an astonishingly insipid "adventure" story, in which the boys themselves do nothing more daring than rescue a fairground dog from its brutal master. In place of the ubiquitous Nazi spy or generic crooks, we have a pinchpenny ship owner, and not a ship in sight. It would be interesting to know if young audiences of the day felt themselves short-changed, as they had every right to do.

It's a road movie without any mention of cars, a tale of three young boys absenting themselves from home without sparking off a nationwide manhunt (indeed, a nationwide manhunt for three runaway boys would have sounded ludicrous in 1946), and it recalls a day when farming was still a labour-intensive industry, and boys carried catapults rather than machetes or Stanley knives.

As with all young heroes of children's fiction, these three side unhesitatingly with the forces of Law and Order against the Wrongdoer, a perennial conceit which rests on the thesis that children are intrinsically moral beings – always knowing what is "right", always recognising "proper" authority. The subtext is wholly insincere, given that parenting and schooling philosophy of the day were based on the contrary assumption. And while the moral compass of mainstream cinema has always been dangerously erratic, the moral compass of material for the young points perpetually to true North. Of course, adult notions of where "true North" lies will change from decade to decade. It is a political assumption.

See subject index under **CIRCUS / FAIRGROUNDS / CARNIVALS, DOGS, GYPSIES / TINKERS / TRAVELLERS, KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS, PASTORALS / HOLIDAYS IN THE COUNTRY, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS** and **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS**.