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Whack-O!

UK TV sitcom : 1956 : dir. ? ? ? : BBC : ? x ? min
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

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Jimmy Edwards; Arthur Howard

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ♀ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Never trust a schoolboy with clean fingernails!

Source: History of Television

Abandon hope all ye who enter here...

Source: Halliwell's Television Companion

Halliwell's Television Companion note on Edwards:

"Hectoring British comedian with wizard-prang moustaches (he had been a wartime Dakota pilot) who made his name in radio's "Take It From Here" and always rose most outrageously to material by its authors, Muir and Norden. On television his best outlet was "Whacko!" for the BBC in the mid to late fifties, playing the headmaster of a minor private school even more corrupt than in life."

"Jimmy Edwards, a comedy star from the radio days of "Take It From Here", was an instant television hit when "Whacko!" came before the cameras in the late fifties."

History of Television note:

"...According to reports of the time, city gentlemen left work early in order to reach home in time for transmissions [of the series "Billy Bunter"] on the Children's Output on BBC (then the only channel). Later, well-

known television comic Jimmy Edwards starred in "Whack-O", a series set in a seedy public school, Chislehurst [sic] (no relation to any real-life academy or institution) with veteran Arthur Howard as his somewhat timid assistant. It was good knock-about comedy."

Caption from BBC TV Presents – a Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration:

"The distinctly unacademic activities at Chiselbury School arrived on the screen in October 1956. The "Whack-O" team in this 1959 episode was led, as ever, by headmaster "Professor" Jimmy Edwards with his assistant, Mr Pettigrew, played by Arthur Howard."

Radio Times retrospective note:

"1956... With Jimmy Edwards as the headmaster, "Whack-O!" arrived on TV..."

[no listing in "The Golden Age of Children's Television", "Into the Box of Delights - a History of Children's Television" or "Television's Greatest Hits"]



Source: BBC TV Presents – a Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration

No further information currently available. Jimmy Edwards returned to make a re-run of this series in the sixties, following a big-screen spinoff (also scripted by Norder and Muir) under the delightfully camp title "**BOTTOMS UP!**" (60). The odd thing about the film and the latter series was, nobody ever actually got whacked – with the single exception in the film of wittering deputy head Pettigrew. Odd indeed for a boarding school sitcom which derived 80% of its punning humour from the delight of trouncing small boys' buttocks. The cane is brandished incessantly – equating it with the atom bomb which, though never dropped, loomed like an omnipresent spectre over the 1960s.

Presumably the rationale behind it all, and similar material - "**Billy Bunter**", "**Jennings**" - echoing the tone of British boys' comics of the day, was that boys derived a vicarious glee from the thought of anybody else getting caned, or from mocking the misery of the cane at a safe distance. It's otherwise difficult to see how what may have been a jolly lark to the series' writers could also have amused the target audience, not a few of whom would have had a close encounter with the stick the very same day.

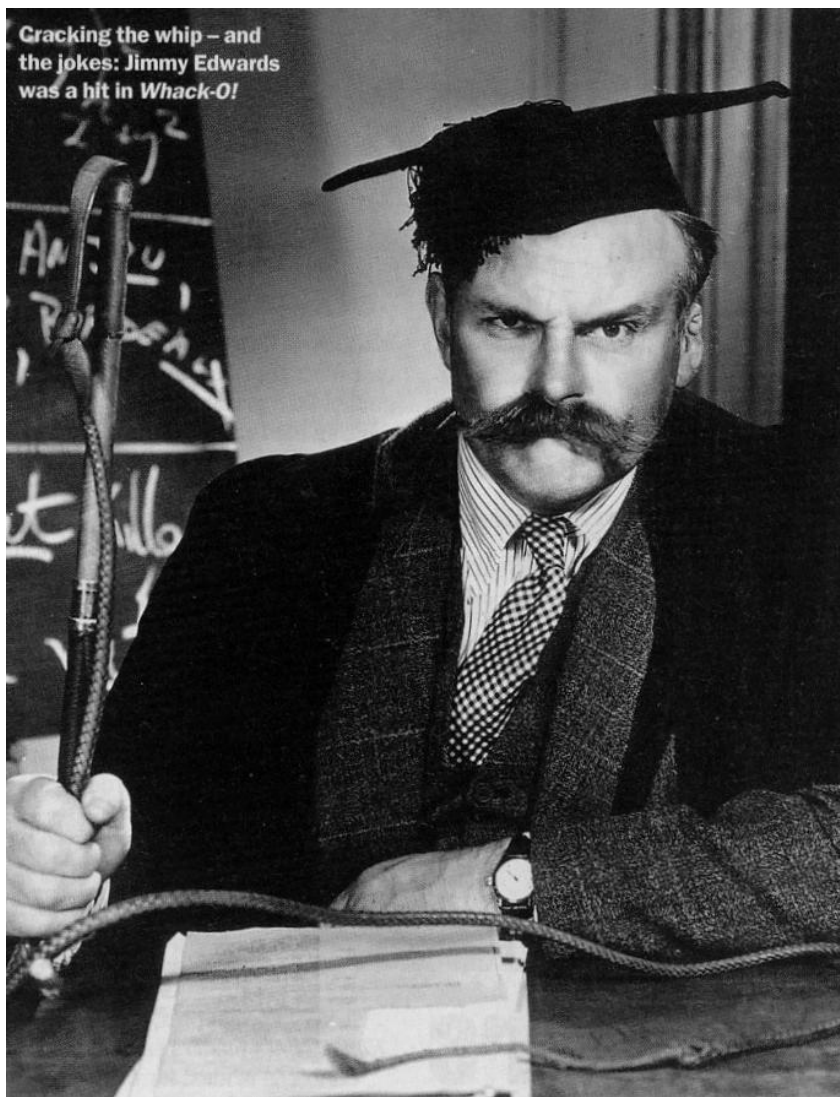
Wittingly or no, Norder and Muir were conveying to a broader audience the essentially public school cavalier approach to beatings, one which did not extend to the state school sector. Other TV comedies like "**Just William**" and "**The Clitheroe Kid**", located more in a domestic

setting, still referred frequently to corporal punishment as the *sine qua non* of British boyhood life. But if their audience was not parents, but recipients of the slipper and cane in person, it's surprising that kids were amused, not offended. Adults enjoy seeing their own private anxieties and embarrassments parodied in sitcoms, but it's assuming a lot to say that child audiences maintain the same emotional distance from whatever they're viewing.

Jimmy Edwards' caricature (of the same name) is not so terribly different from the wily, blustering, ignoramus headmaster and ex-con popularised by Will Hay. Like his predecessor, Jim enjoys a flutter and a drink, is anything but bookish, and easily outwitted by the cunning of his pupils. Edwards is a more bombastic authoritarian figure, a volcanic despot in mortar board and gown, given at times of desperation to lachrymose outbursts. His inefficiency as a tyrant make him more of an Oliver Hardy type, a nemesis who may be armed but scarcely dangerous.

Also, in the "**Whack-O!**" series, the pupils were at least of schoolgoing age (there was never a child to be seen in the classrooms and playgrounds of "**Please Sir!**", John Alderton's secondary modern sitcom). Jim's nemesis among the boys rejoiced under the name of Wendover. For more detailed comment, see Mario Zampi's "**BOTTOMS UP!**" Today, from a society where headteachers are prosecuted in court (and the tabloids) for raising a hand to a pupil, it all seems quaintly bizarre and (to modern parents at any rate) unfathomable. But these same parents have generated a culture where no adult dare touch a child, whether in affection or in anger, for fear of criminal allegations. Which was the healthier attitude we leave history to judge.

See subject index under **BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT** and **SITCOMS & SOAPS**.



Lashings of fun with professor Jim

Source: Radio Times