

# Desmond Tester

Titles: 2      Sources: 2      Stills: 3

Born: Ealing, London; February 17<sup>th</sup> 1919

Britain's severe child performer restrictions blighted the development of genuine boy film stars in the 1930s, so that many of the better known names of that period – Hughie Green, Tester, Anthony Newley, all made their first films at 14 or 15. In Tester's own case he continued to play boy roles for some years nonetheless – the victim of a terrorist bomb he was unwittingly sent to deliver in Hitchcock's "**SABOTAGE**", a young Tudor monarch in "**TUDOR ROSE**", and Sabu's English drummer-boy comrade in "**THE DRUM**".



*Kilt hoist by the sergeant major for smoking in the barracks in "**THE DRUM**" – but he's already 19 here.*

*Source: indeterminate website*

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"British boy actor of the Thirties. Went to Australia."

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"With a disorderly quiff of red hair, a homely face in which bluff good nature struggled with diffidence, and the weird middle-class accent of

early English talkies (he was in fact educated at the posh Highgate School in London), Desmond Tester was Britain's leading boy actor of the mid-Thirties, and though he didn't make all that many youthful films, had some very important films.

He had made his stage debut at the Duchess Theatre, London, in December 1931, as the page in *"The Merry Wives of Windsor"*, and a year or so later created the title role in a stage version of *"Emil and the Detectives"*. (When it was filmed in 1935, the younger and less characterful John Williams was the hero.)

After a secondary part in **"MIDSHIPMAN EASY"**, 1936 was Tester's *annus mirabilis*, playing sidekick to Maurice Chevalier in **"THE BELOVED VAGABOND"**, the boy king Edward VI in **"TUDOR ROSE"** (his 1936 head looking frankly absurd emerging from 1547 gear), and - unforgettably - as Sylvia Sidney's schoolboy son blown up on the London bus by Oscar Homolka's bomb in **"SABOTAGE"**. (It is one of Hitchcock's wickedest tricks that up to the very last moment one doesn't believe this can actually happen.)

A few years after the end of World War Two, the amiable Tester emigrated to Australia, where he became well-known on TV as host of a children's show called **"Channel Ninepins"**, and as a principal comic in the long-running serial **"The Kaper Cops"** (1959-65). More recently he has appeared in films as various as **"BARRY McKENZIE HOLDS HIS OWN"** (74) and **"WILD DUCK"** (84)."

## FILMOGRAPHY

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Title</i>                                                                                                   | <i>Role</i>              |
|-------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 34          | 15         | NIGHT CLUB QUEEN                                                                                               | <b>Not</b> in title role |
| 35          | 16         | MIDSHIPMAN EASY<br><i>with Hughie Green</i>                                                                    |                          |
| 36          | 17         | THE BELOVED VAGABOND                                                                                           | as Edward VI             |
| 36          |            | SABOTAGE                                                                                                       |                          |
| 36          |            | TUDOR ROSE<br><i>with Johnny Singer</i>                                                                        |                          |
| 37          | 18         | NON-STOP NEW YORK                                                                                              | as Boy Holder            |
| 38          | 19         | THE DRUM <br><i>with Sabu</i> |                          |
| 38          |            | AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME                                                                                           |                          |
| 39          | 20         | THE STARS LOOK DOWN                                                                                            |                          |