

Housemaster

UK : 1938 : dir. Herbert Brenon : ABPC : 95 min
 prod: : scr: Dudley Leslie & Elizabeth Meehan : dir.ph.: Otto Kanturek
[Henry Hepworth](#)
 Otto Kruger; Diana Churchill; Phillips Holmes; Joyce Barbour; Kynaston Reeves; Rene Ray;
 Walter Hudd; John Wood; Cecil Parker; Michael Shepley; Jimmy Hanley

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ♀ M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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The master / boy compact in the public school: a sado-masochistic ritual of hierarchy is recognised by both, and accepted without rancour.

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

““British public school life viewed in a humorous light. The film is based on the play "Bachelor Born" by Ian Hay. It's showing its age. * ”

Halliwell's Film Guide review

“A schoolmaster sides with his boys against the new headmaster's dictatorial methods. Pleasing photographed play with all concerned in good form. * ”

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "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"]

What's On TV review:

“Otto Kruger and Phillips Holmes clash over the best way to run a school in this cramped filmed play. ** ”

“Comedy-drama starring Otto Kruger. A teacher takes the side of his pupils to protest at a new headmaster's dictatorial methods.¹ ”

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Hepworth's elder brother Ronnie:

“Ronnie and his younger brothers Henry and John – who all acted in British films of the mid-thirties – were great-nephews of the famous Sir Charles Hawtrey (1828-1923). Ronnie, a brown-eyed version of William (James) Fox in the next generation, had the same tousled prep-school charm, though he was much too posh for the accordion-playing hero of his biggest hit, "**DANNY BOY**".

Ronnie's blond younger brothers (who followed him at intervals of about a year apiece) were with him in "**CHANNEL CROSSING**" and "**DICK TURPIN**", and without him in "**MEN OF YESTERDAY**" (37).

Henry Hepworth was also in "**THE BROKEN ROSARY**" (34), "**THE CITY OF BEAUTIFUL NONSENSE**" (34) and "**HOUSEMASTER**" (38).”

¹ An almost verbatim crib from Halliwell, as you see

No further information currently available. Otto Kruger is the best thing about this frighteningly stilted pre-war British school film, with all its staginess very much intact. "**GOODBYE MR CHIPS**" was shot only the following year, although there seems a good decade between that and such an archaic, rheumatic work. As a comedy, this is dead in the water, and probably wasn't much funnier in 1938. Jimmy Hanley (not thankfully the principal boy) was 20 here. He appeared earlier in "**LITTLE FRIEND**" (34) and "**BOYS WILL BE BOYS**" (35), also a public school comedy.

[Henry Hepworth](#) was 17 and, to be honest, does look it, rejoicing here under the name of "Bunny", or something of that sort. His caning, which opens the film, was for bird-nesting out of bounds: "Did that hurt?" "Oh yes sir!" "I hope it did, or we'd both have been wasting our time!" "Do you think it gives me any satisfaction to do that?" "Yes sir! I mean.. No sir!" The chummy post-chastisement chat between Kruger and Hepworth offers an amusing glimpse of the compact between masters and boys without which institutional corporal punishment, like adult prison regimes, would have been untenable. It is hard to conceive of the modern generation ever submitting to the *indignity* of a caning, whatever the pro's and cons of school beatings on an ethical level.

See subject index under [BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL](#) and [CORPORAL PUNISHMENT](#), and see in particular "**IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG**" (pupils revolt against a dictatorial new head), "[BOTTOMS UP!](#)" (pupils revolt against the same old cane-swishing head) and "**CARRY ON TEACHER**" (pupils revolt to prevent cane-swishing head from moving to a new school).