

Tom Brown's School Days

(aka: "Adventures at Rugby")

US : 1940 : dir. Robert Stevenson : RKO

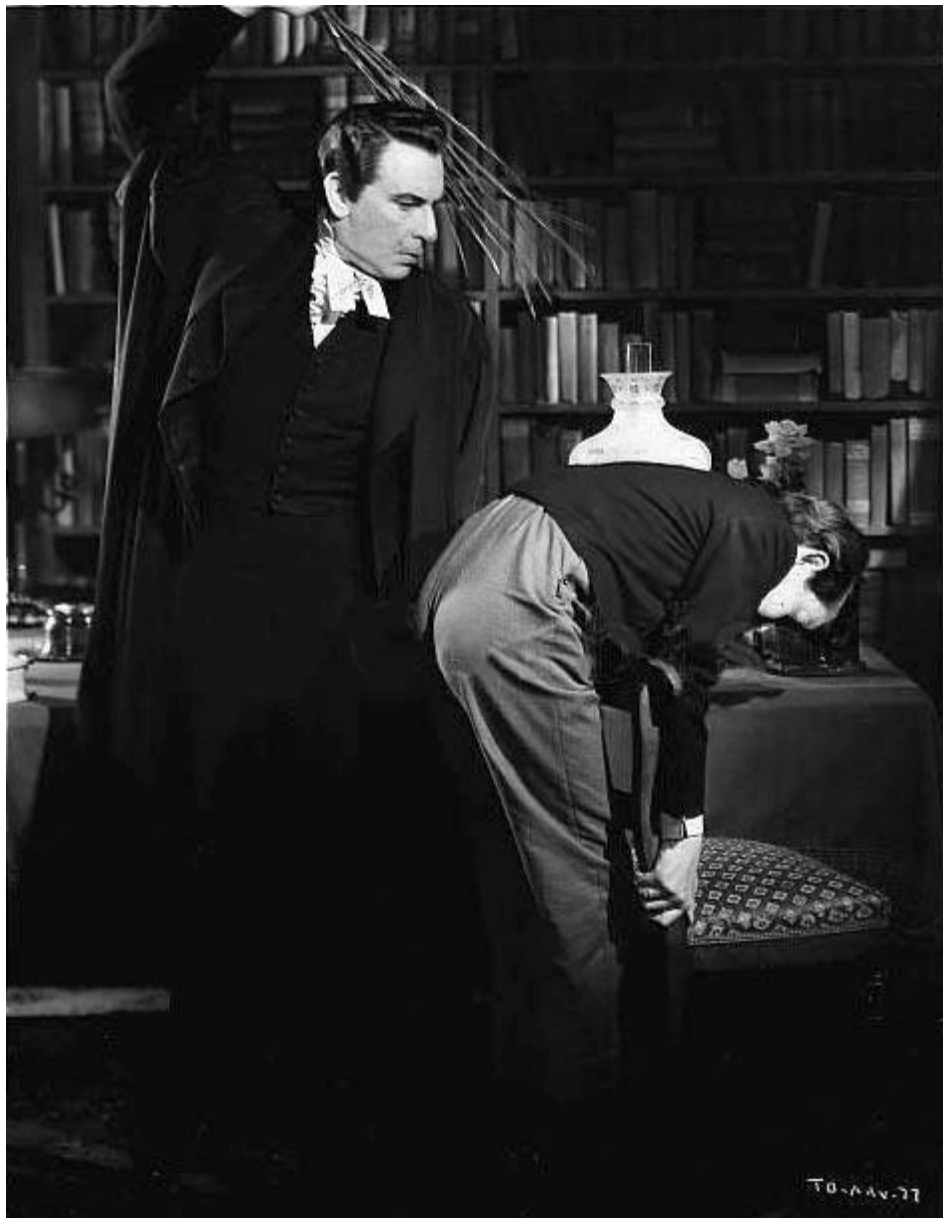
: 86 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[Jimmy Lydon](#); [Freddie Bartholomew](#); [Billy Halop](#)

Cedric Hardwicke; Gale Storm; Josephine Hutchinson; Polly Moran

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	✂	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Dr Arnold kindly puts some colour back in Tom's cheeks. But drat the boy, is he grateful?

Source: indeterminate website

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Occasionally over-baked but still entertaining, fast-paced account of life at a Victorian boys' school. Although most of cast is American, British flavour seeps through. Retitled **"ADVENTURES AT RUGBY"**. ****1/2** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Nostalgic account of life at a Victorian boys' school. Although most of cast is American, the British flavour still seeps through. Retitled **"ADVENTURES AT RUGBY"**. ****1/2** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Tom Brown finds life at Rugby brutal, but helps to become a civilising influence. Pretty lively Hollywood version of a rather unattractive semi-classic."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"Engrossing saga of Tom's exploits in a boys' school that seems like a hell-house until he improves things. The Victorian atmosphere is rendered with aplomb by a mixed bag of Brits and Hollywood reliables. ******* "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"1939 version had Cedric Hardwicke as Dr Arnold, Freddie Bartholomew, and a cast of absurd Americans as the other inmates of Rugby. 77"

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Much can be said for the treatment in this edition of the Thomas Hughes yarn. While remaining faithful to the spirit of the original, it contrives to vitalise the action and humanise the characters. Thus young Tom's confused terror among the milling cruelties of the young hellions on his first time away from home is understandable and compelling. The terrible seriousness of his scrapes, his fights and youthful crises are immediate and vivid.

Although **"TOM BROWN"** is not a lavish production, it is sympathetically and skilfully made, with many touching moments and an excellent cast. It alters the emphasis somewhat from the development of the boy to the character of the headmaster, Arnold. But that should bother only a few purists. It probably results in a better picture, since Cedric Hardwicke, who plays the wise and kindly teacher, is much better qualified to carry a story than is any Hollywood prodigy.

Hardwicke's performance is one of the best he has ever given on the screen. While maintaining the schoolmaster's surface severity, he clearly indicates the underlying sympathy, tolerance, quiet humour and steadfast courage. In the title part, Jimmy Lydon is believable and moving in the early portions, but too young for the final moments. Freddie Bartholomew is sincere and convincing as Tom's sidekick, while Josephine Hutchinson's lustrous quality makes the role of the headmaster's wife seem too brief. Billy Halop is a properly sadistic bully."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

" "Old school tie" story mixes top Hollywood production values and minor classic of British secondary schools into an enjoyable froth filled with all the clichés that have since been completely overexposed in ludicrous movie and television treatments. Better than one would think and not the creaky old groaner it could have been. ****1/2** "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times note:

"Adaptation of the childhood classic in which Tom Brown leaves his loving home and is subjected to the ruthlessness of upper class bully boys. "

What's On TV note:

“Life at Rugby is brutal for Tom Brown and his friends who are tested over and over by their elders.¹”

“Premiere. Classic story of life at a turn-of-the-century English public school. Stars Freddie Bartholomew and Cedric Hardwicke.”

Sunday Times note:

“Classic tale of English public school life, with Cedric Hardwicke, Freddie Bartholomew.”

¹ *shouldn't that be "toasted" ?*

A rather fatuous argument from *Variety*, that because a seasoned adult actor can turn in a subtler performance than a young boy (not invariably true), the central character of the story ought to take second place to him! So this is "DR ARNOLD'S SCHOOLDAYS" is it – and "only a few purists" would take exception to that? How about the author of the book?

At 17, Jimmy Lydon was a bit long in the tooth to be playing the feckless lead (he appeared in "**BACKDOOR TO HEAVEN**" the previous year) and it's perhaps surprising that the part wasn't offered to Bartholomew, who after all was at least English, a year younger, and already an established name at the box office. Just three years after "**CAPTAINS COURAGEOUS**" had won him new respect, were American audiences starting to tire of his well-spoken but invariably prissy screen persona? He's cast as Tom's Rugby soulmate, East.

More surprising yet was the choice of Billy Halop to play the haughty, aristocratic Flashman. Halop, here aged 20, was the leader of the original **DEAD END KIDS**, who in films with John Garfield such as "**THEY MADE ME A CRIMINAL**" and "**DUST BE MY DESTINY**" consolidated his character as hard-nosed wrong-side-of-the-tracks boy with a yearning for better things, but in any case essentially honourable. The antithesis of Flashman, in fact.

See also the tame but decorous John Howard Davies 1951 version, which had at least the virtue of being shot in situ at Rugby School, although that entailed a certain bowdlerising of the school's disciplinary history. A more faithful British television serialisation was broadcast in the early seventies.

See subject index under [BOARDING SCHOOL/PUBLIC SCHOOL](#), [BULLYING](#), [CORPORAL PUNISHMENT](#) and [HISTORY](#).

(I wonder, by the bye, what American audiences made of that traditional British public school term "fagging"? Language, and vernacular usage, can throw up some amusing embarrassments. When Al Jolson made his happy hobo vehicle "**HALLELUJAH I'M A BUM!**" the last word had to be blanked out for UK release. Disney's "**FREE WILLY**" will also have caused a few unlooked-for titters across the water, with its tag-line of "How far would **you** go for a friend?", and a title song supplied by Michael Jackson. In the Netherlands, the Swedish term for "little girl" – "flikka" – has become an all-purpose term of abuse equivalent to "queer" or "fag", so the boy-and-his-horse film (and TV series) "**MY FRIEND FLIKKA**" no doubt will have caused a certain discomfort over there.)