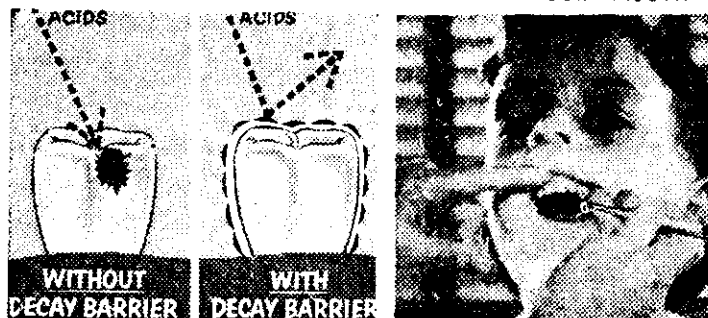


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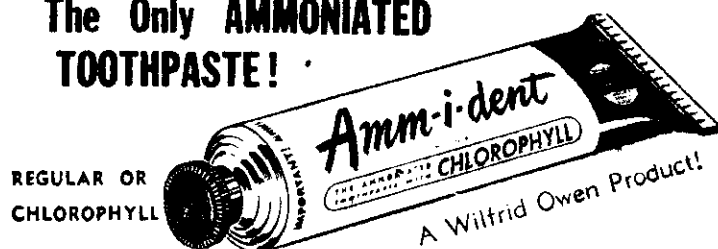
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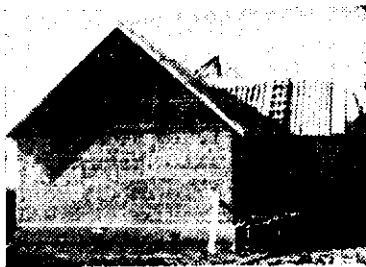


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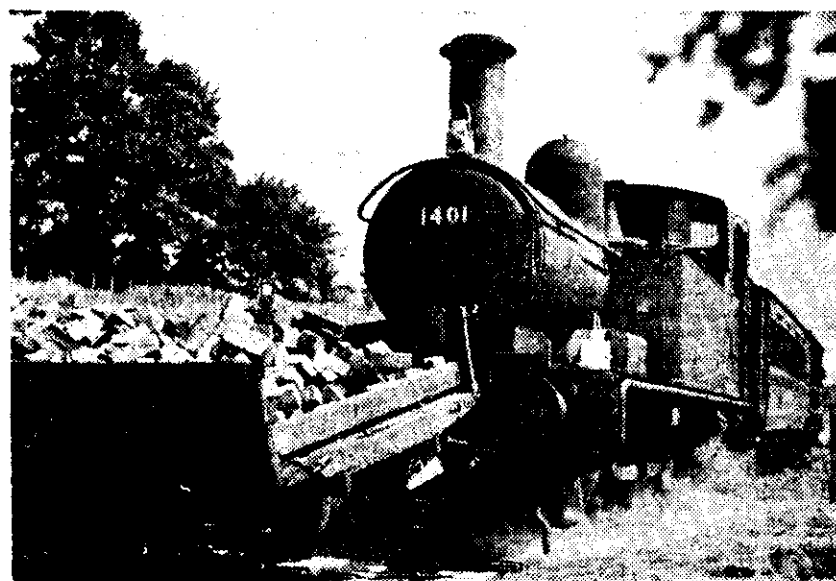
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FILM REVIEWS, BY P.J.W.

Branch Line Shenanigans

THE TITFIELD THUNDERBOLT

(Rank-Ealing)

THOSE indefatigable makers of good comedy, the men and women at Ealing Studios, have produced a film which is different from any they have done before, as charming as a child's story-book tale, and as pleasant to look at as an English summer landscape. It concerns the attempts of the inhabitants of Titfield, who live in rustic seclusion at the end of a weedy branch line of British Railways, to stop the Government from closing down the line because it doesn't pay its way.

The village quickly divides into supporters of the railway and those who have more faith in the new bus service to the city, which will take over after the railway is closed. The film thus develops into a parable of modern living, with the champions of bucolic serenity aligned against the mechanisation of buses, the stench of petrol, concrete roads, and the general garishness of the motor age which the village has so far escaped.

This aspect of the story, which shows a kinship with the cobwebby railway cartoons of Rowland Emmett in *Punch*, is emphasised in the film's climax. As a result of sabotage to the existing train by agents of the bus company, the railway supporters decide to drag out from the village museum the Titfield Thunderbolt, an engine which used to run along the line in the 1840s, and use it to make the decisive trip into town. The events which have preceded this moment include a duel between the train, a steam roller, and a truck loaded with bricks, at a crossing; immense plottings at the vicarage and the local pub, the battle of the water tank, and a truly amazing sequence where two drunken railway supporters steal an engine from the near-by town one moonlit night and drive it blissfully off the rails, through the main street, and over the fields towards Titfield.

One of the happiest features about the film is its nonchalant disregard for reality whenever the scriptwriter, T. E. B. Clarke, has felt like leaving the rails

BAROMETER

FAIR TO FINE: "The Titfield Thunderbolt."
FAIR: "Top Secret."

of probability behind him. Other notable qualities are the excellent use of colour, which is reminiscent of John Ford's *The Quiet Man*, and the photography of George Slocumbe, who reveals himself again as an untiring craftsman. Some aspects of the film's technique are not so good. The deliberately slow pace at the beginning is overdone, and the general handling of mood and tempo by the director, Charles Crichton, is somewhat uncertain. A fine performance is given by George Relph as the rabbit-like vicar who becomes a lion on the footplate of a railway engine. John Gregson is the young squire who becomes a guard, and Stanley Holloway is the eccentric millionaire who lends financial aid on condition that the train has a bar on board which opens at a quarter to nine sharp every morning.

TOP SECRET

(Associated British)

THE idea behind this satire on the atomic age, which has been advertised here (for some unspecified reason) under the title *Mr Potts Goes to Moscow*, is a good one, but it hasn't been carried out quite as successfully as it might have been. The story tells how a disgruntled but thoroughly patriotic plumber working at a British atomic centre unwittingly carries off the plans of a devastating new weapon when he goes on his annual holiday. He arrives in France, unaware of the immense hue and cry in the British Press over the disappearance of the plans, and is lured by a Russian diplomat into accepting a job in Moscow. The Russians think he is a brilliant scientist, but he is under the illusion that it is his services as a plumber that the Soviets have engaged. When he discovers his mistake Mr. Potts manages to make his way to Berlin, where after an amusing chase through the city he escapes into the British sector. The film is well scripted and is aided by a refreshing portrayal of Mr. Potts by George Cole, who appeared as the awkward soldier in *The Changing of the Guard*. But much of this merit is lost through the colourless and rather heavy direction of Mario Zampa.