

“Good boy,” only, “In that case, stand over there and do it.”

Twenty-two years later, after I had directed *Reach for the Sky* and it had been the biggest hit of the year, winning a Bafta for best picture and making me the blue-eyed boy at Pinewood Studios, there came Rank’s annual Christmas dinner. All the posher directors and actors were invited. Next to me was Michael Powell. I reminded him of that long, hard night. He didn’t soften. “Now you’re a director,” he said, “you know what we had to put up with in those days.”

Will Hay was a bit jollier, or rather his comedies were. He himself was not nearly so extrovert as the blustering chancer he played. In private life he was an astronomer who discovered a new star and named it after himself. In his films, his character was often a schoolmaster who was surrounded by the same six boys. In two of these pictures, *Boys Will Be Boys* and *Good Morning, Boys* I was one of those pupils. The principal two were the fat Graham Moffatt and the old Moore Marriott, neither of whom were real boys but that was part of the fun. Another boy was the comedy actor Charles Hawtrey. He played the swot, always being bullied by the others. I didn’t forget him.

During most of the films I was in, though, I was on my own and technicians, seeing a boy, often with nothing to do, became teachers. “Want to have a peep through here, son?” the camera operator would ask. “Find out what it’s going to be like on the screen?” and so I would get to look through the viewfinder. Then he would explain that what I saw was achieved by a particular lens that he and the director had chosen together. His assistant, the focus puller, would chime in by telling me why he made chalk marks on the floor during rehearsals and why he kept measuring the distance, with a tape measure, between the actors and the camera. The boom operator, not to be outdone,