



***Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939) is a summer 2026 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library's Classic Cinema Collection. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.**

6 of a possible 20 points = *1/2 = a very deficient movie

**Great Britain 1939 black-and-white 115 minutes live action feature drama
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Producers: Sam Wood and Victor Saville
a Warner Bros. Archive dvd release**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 1 Direction: Sam Wood and Sidney Franklin**
- 1 Editing: Charles Frend**

- 1 Cinematography: Freddie Young
- 0 Lighting
- 0 Screenplay: R. C. Sherriff, Claudine West, and Eric Marschwitz, based on the novel by James Hilton
- 1 Music: Richard Addinsell
- 0 Art Direction: Alfred Junge
- Makeup: Jack Dawn*
- 1 Sound: C. C. Stevens and A. W. Watkins
- 1 Acting
- 0 Creativity
- 6 total points

Cast: Robert Donat* (Mr. Chips), Greer Garson (Katherine), Terry Kilburn (j) (John Colley/Peter Colley/Peter Colley II/Peter Colley III), John Mills (Peter Colley as a young man), Paul Henreid (Staefel), Judith Furse (Flora), Lyn Harding (Wetherby), Milton Rosmer (Chatteris), Frederick Leister (Marshall), Louise Hampton (Mrs. Wickett), Austin Trevor (Ralston), David Tree (Jackson), Edmund Breon (Colonel Morgan), Jill Furse (Helen Colley), Scott Sunderland (Sir John Colley), Ernest Blyth (Austrian officer boarding train), John Blythe (j) (boy calling assembly), H. Carleton-Crowe (Mr. Chip's batman), David Croft (j) (Perkins – greengrocer's boy), Clive Dunn (j) (youth), Cyril Frankel (j) (schoolboy), Peter Gawthorne (army general), Pat Hagan (dancer), Martin Heller (j) (schoolboy), Martita Hunt (British tourist on bicycle), Simon Lack (Wainwright), John Longden (Raven), Guy Middleton (McCulloch), Cyril Raymond (teacher), J. H. Roberts (doctor), Michael Shepley (teacher), Nigel Stock (John Forrester), Merle Tottenham (Nellie, maid to Mr. and Mrs. Chipping), others

Not one of British cinema's finest moments, *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939), produced in the looming shadow of World War II, is awash in Old School nostalgia, sentimentality, and jingoistic patriotism. In addition to those compromising qualities it extols caning and whipping as morally appropriate means of disciplining youths. None of these are qualities likely to endear either characters or story to contemporary audiences.

Based on a popular novel by incontestable romantic James Hilton, this pre-war school story for adults concerns the decades-long career of one Mr. Chipping at a British public school named Brookfield (a moniker which for this reviewer recalls a local zoo of my childhood). Initially torn on arrival between functioning as a punitive dictator and engaging immersively in a hearts-and-flowers sympathetic counseling role, Chipping finds himself jeered by students and lectured by headmaster, the latter suggesting perhaps he ought switch to another career path.

No dice. Our protagonist will stumble doggedly onward, enlightening charges about the glory of Latin history and language. Something eminently next-to-useless in the modern world. Director Sam Wood regales viewers with fleeting scenes of cricket and football, adversarial sports representing obsessions of English upper and lower social classes, obviously attempting to present Brookfield as offering the best of both worlds, though exclusively to boys. Girls need not apply. As their roles in adult society will be simply reproductive and supportive of male initiatives, serving in cheerleading capacities for spousal egos and careers. Thus the goal of a Brookfield education in character development is to marry a traditional housemaker, obtain an army commission (or, if coming from a poorer family, win a batman's position defending the honor of an associated *guy*'nor), repopulate the public school assembly, and end up on such an institution's Board of Governors.

All of which would make for quite a boring narrative. To pique a bit of interest in such uninspiring fare, a romantic subplot is introduced, with Chipping being dragged off to Austria for a holiday among the most unrealistic rocks and fog ever manufactured for studio use. Enter Greer Garson, who plays progressive Katherine, only child of a prosperous landed English family. She's bicycling her way with a chaperone across Europe. Katherine is single, apparently dotes on children (and schoolmaster bachelors), inclines to climb unfamiliar mountains wearing fashionably long dresses, spurns assistance from anything so inconsequential as a local guide. This enables Chipping to meet up with her solo on a misty ledge overlooking sheer cliffs. The result: love at first sight. Of course.

After wining, dining, and dancing in what appears to be a palatial ballroom in Vienna, the two lovebirds return separately to London for a quick marriage before next term begins. Chipping soon gets reduced to the less pompous state

of a plebian “Chips.” Katherine rebrands simply as Mrs. Chips. Her only functions post-marriage are hosting professional colleagues of her husband, providing tea and cakes for hungry students in hubby’s classes, home redecorating, and attempting to assure an heir for Mr. Chips. She’s quite successfully employed in the first three categories. However, enterprise in the fourth proves fatal.

Thus Chips must make do with molding moral fibers of other people’s children. That’s his destiny.

While questioning the wisdom of educational reforms at his school, Chips never expresses dissatisfaction with political decisions robbing his country of its best and brightest young men. The unwritten rule of Brookfield for its charges could be summarized as “Yours Is But to Do and Die.” Leave questions, tears, and doubts to wimps and females. Oh, and make sure child fisticuffs are restricted to off hours and places where adult interference is highly unlikely.

Unfortunately, lavish interiors and imposing makeup by Jack Dawn for the Chips character inadequately compensate for rather sluggish editing, academic cinematography, poorly defined lighting, unmemorable and emotionally insipid music, and a soundtrack all too often filled with rushed, indistinct dialogue.

Nor does ensemble acting raise the overall low level of achievement here. Robert Donat’s performance in the title role merits its Oscar® commendation. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences nomination of Greer Garson as Best Actress, though, was presumably for good sportsmanship in accommodating herself to such an insultingly demeaning screenplay.

There are no bonus features other than subtitle options on this Warner Bros. Archive dvd release. The movie is suitable viewing for families willing to accept subsidiary roles for females in society and unquestioned loyalty to wasteful government warmongering policies.