

John Mann for BHG website

The following article appeared in the Spring Term, 1949 edition of the Boys County School magazine the 'Beccehamian.' It was written by 12 year old Adrian Brine who himself went on to become a notable Shakespearean actor.



OLD BECCEHAMIAN CROOK-CHASER

The time is 6.45 pm From the corner in which the radio stands come the familiar sounds of a car-smash, or perhaps the dull thud of fist on face, interspersed with the voice of an Old Beccehamian. "Come on, Captain Barton!" Or "Take that, you dirty rat!" says John Mann, alias "Snowey White" of "Dick Barton. Yes, John Mann (as many of you know) is an Old Beccehamian, as I discovered when I interviewed him recently.

He was born in Beckenham, on April 7, 1915. After finishing his education here, he studied at R.A.D.A. (the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art). His first engagement (theatrically !) was at Drury Lane Theatre, where he had a part in a play called "The Three Sisters." Since then, among numerous shows and films in which he has appeared, "The Housemaster," "Vicky" and "Goodbye Mr. Chips" are included. During the war he served in the Army and, since being demobbed, has acted at many theatres, including the Grand Theatre, Croydon, the Penge Empire and the Q Theatre in London. He has also toured in revue.

He is of slight build, with sandy hair and tortoiseshell spectacles; is married, and shows a sympathetic interest in autograph hunters of all ages. His ordinary speaking voice differs considerably from that which is heard by millions of listeners each week night upon the radio, being more cultured and of a deeper tone. John Mann is always very willing to give talks at local societies and fetes, such as the Conservative Organisation, the Beckenham Safety First Day, which was held at the Recreation Ground, the Beckenham Library Junior Book Club, and various Cinema Clubs. His great personality and sparkling sense of humour always endear him to his audiences.

His first broadcast was in "Just William," but since then he has acted in a large number of radio entertainments, including the ex-Service show "They're Out!", the variety show "Harmony Hall," the Leslie Banks' humorous serial "Scoop!"; C. J. Cutcliffe-Hyne's famous "Captain Kettle" ; and, of course, our old friend, "Dick Barton—Special Agent." He did a lot of film work before the war, including "bits and pieces" in the Charles Laughton film "Rembrandt"; "Such is Life"; "Cafe Colette"; "Double Exposure"; and, more recently, two films which are not yet released : the Jack Warner-Kathleen Harrison, "Wedding Bells", and the film of Rafael Sabatini's "Columbus," with Frederick March in the title-role. His main hobby is sport : he plays hockey for the Old Beccehamians and is a keen cricket enthusiast.

I wonder how many of us will be as great a credit to the School as he is ?

John Mann lived in Cromwell Road and later in Village Way, Beckenham. From 1946 until 1951 the BBC broadcast 711 episodes of Dick Barton Special Agent. John is on the right in the above photo. As Adrian wrote above , John always found time to support local events. In 1950 he took part in a concert at the Elm Road Church Hall to raise funds to rebuild the Manse destroyed during WW2.

When he appeared on stage at the Elmers End Odeon to the sound of *Devils Galop*, the Dick Barton theme music, he brought the house down. Today there is similar acclaim whenever Croydon's Warehouse Theatre stages its Dick Barton shows - the next run starts on December 12th, 2008.