

## Sarratt Local History Society

### ‘Britain’s Hollywood... Elstree’s Film Heritage’ by Bob Redman.

To most of the audience’s surprise it seems that not only did the Studios at Elstree start 100 years ago but, of the 10 biggest grossing films of all time, only 4 were shot in Hollywood and 6 were shot in Elstree! This includes, of course, ‘Star Wars’.

The history of Elstree Studios is a strange mixture of repeatedly failing businesses side by side with an incredible catalogue of successful films and world famous stars. Indeed while the constantly changing names of the studios themselves and their over optimistic owners have mostly been long forgotten, it would be easier to list the names of stars who have not worked at Elstree than those who have.

From Charles Laughton, Anna Neagle and Stuart Granger, through to Lawrence Olivier, Richard Todd and Audrey Hepburn the roll call goes on to include almost any contemporary star whom you could name at random and hundreds of films that are still family favourites. But although even that most successful American of shows, ‘the Muppets’ was filmed at Elstree the Studios themselves, built over various sites, were repeatedly bankrupt, burnt down or even simply transformed into storage units or Tesco.

In the 1990s, the owners, Brent Walker, having failed to get planning permission to demolish everything on the site, allowed the buildings to be vandalized. At this moment (1996) the local Council took the unlikely but highly imaginative step of themselves investing in the Studios. They persuaded the BBC to build the sets of soaps like Albert Square there, and when BBC moved out of its main TV studios in Shepherds Bush, Elstree became even more in demand.

The Studios are now a flourishing, highly efficiently-run organisation where the most glamorous, choosy and difficult-to-please stars and directors are only too happy to work. The public are also given the ‘star treatment’ in the various tours and events designed to show both the history and current work at Elstree. So it and neighbouring Borehamwood are now well and truly on the world map.

**Angela Colman**