

## Sarratt Local History Society Talk by Eve Davis 22 March 'Old Hemel Hempstead'

For many younger people in this area, Hemel Hempstead is synonymous with 'the magic roundabout', supermarkets and modern buildings. But for an older generation it was a gentle little town with picturesque streets, individual shops and small terraces of traditional houses and cottages. This was the Hemel that Eve Davis introduced to us with her comprehensive collection of photographs and postcards.

The old High Street, once the home of 24 pubs and ale houses, still retains some of its original charm, but long gone and only recorded in faded black and white and sepia, are the family shopkeepers and staff in their long white aprons, bowler hats and high starched collars, staring out at the camera with quiet dignity and pride. Gradually



photographs show the disappearance of the Railway arches and the entry of early chain-stores like Boots the Chemist, Sainsbury's, the Co-op and Montague Burton. Then the excitement of the first cinemas (or Picture Palaces as they were originally known) – The Princess, The Luxor and finally The Odeon, their very names an indication of the exotic glamour their presence brought to small English towns like Hemel.

Of nearby Boxmoor, Mrs Davis projected photos recording long forgotten celebrations of 'Charter' Days, Works-outings and picnics, and images of old ponds and water-splashes where horses drank and small boys played. She spoke of the outdoor, unheated but Olympic-sized swimming pool where, in good weather, young people would spend the whole day. And she told us of the prank played by her husband and friends as young boys who once turned a horse back to front in the shafts of the cart it was pulling, to the bafflement of the returning owner.

Thanks to Eve Davis, the people and buildings that made up Hemel Hempstead as it was for a long time, are recorded and their memory kept from fading. I suspect people will be looking at her collection long after the present steel, glass and concrete anonymous blocks have been replaced several times over! And perhaps the 'magic roundabout' will have been grassed over in a 'greener' if less 'convenient' world. *24 May, 8pm at Sarratt School, . 'London's Countryside in the '50's' (including Sarratt) on cine film by Alan Willmott.*

Angela Colman