

## Sarratt Local History Society Tuesday 24 May 'London's Countryside in the 1950's on Cine Film

Well, you missed a treat. A cosy venue for a heart warming glimpse into post war Britain. The History Society had invited Alan Wilmott to show us just what London's Countryside looked like in the 1950's. Mr Wilmott spent 35 years working for British Rail's Film Unit and really imparted his enthusiasm and love of the subject. He has become a custodian of these 'little gems' which would otherwise have been lost.

He and his colleagues gave us a fascinating insight to our past. The 20 minute films or travelogues were shown on a 16mm reel to reel projector which added a sense of period especially when there was a short break in proceedings while the films were repaired. These films were often shown in cinemas on 35mm as 'shorts' to generate revenue and encourage people to venture outside their city environment. Edgar Anstey was in charge of production and made over 500 films for the British Transport Commission with the idea to educate and inform. They were beautifully shot with high production values and atmospheric soundtracks.

The films were often made for London Transport and the British Tourist Association to advertise Britain and encourage tourism. Cars were still the preserve of the middle classes so the Green Line bus and trains were other means of getting away!!

Beaconsfield Studios were used to produce the films and so we saw plenty of footage of the Chilterns and surrounding areas (I think Sarratt got a mention!) before the urban sprawl. Wycombe still looked like a very small town and there were giggles over the traffic: one Ford Prefect and a bus coming down a road which would have been the A40.

The fashions, even at the seaside, dictated shirt and tie, albeit with the sleeves rolled up. Ladies in dresses with handbags, hats, walked along the promenade and of course everybody smoked!

These travelogues gave an idealised view of the rural areas but were charming and historically invaluable.

It showed East Anglia with its churches and the Broads, people enjoying their leisure in Yarmouth, children free from health and safety restrictions on municipal boating lakes minus life jackets, climbing trees and running free. An altogether different world. Farmers harvesting fruit straight from the tree to the cardboard basket with metal alloy handles. (No packaging.) I remember mimicking my grandmother as she carried her basket on her arm. These films are a superb tool for learning now, and Mr Wilmott is a terrific find for the History Society. He will be giving another talk on 17 November in Watford which I will definitely attend. Please can we have him back before then!

**Tracy Ford**