

'A Royal Day to Remember'



The Queen's Diamond Jubilee visit
Thursday June 14th 2012



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A HITCHIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRODUCTION

Old Hitchin

VOLUME TWO

on Film



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WRITTEN & PRESENTED BY
Richard Whitmore
& SAM HALLAS

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 135 MINUTES.

Old Hitchin on Film

VOLUME TWO

1 The Priory Fête of 1951: A glimpse of one of Hitchin's most popular summer events of the 1950s, when Sir Ralph Delmé-Radcliffe allowed the local Conservative Party to use the grounds of Hitchin Priory for their annual fund-raising effort. First held in the 1920s the fête sometimes attracted as many as 10,000 visitors. In 1951 Douglas King, son of one of the organisers, was given a ciné-camera for his birthday and decided to make that year's Priory Fete his first subject.

2 The 1951 General Election: In October the same year Douglas also filmed the declaration of the General Election result for Hitchin Division, made on the steps of the Town Hall in Brand Street. Although his camera had no sound equipment he still managed to capture the excitement of the event as the winning candidate was carried shoulder-high through the town by jubilant supporters.

3 The Graveley Air Disaster of 1912: This was one of the earliest crashes in which British airmen died while on active service. The two fliers were taking part in military manoeuvres in the run-up to the First World War and their deaths shocked the nation. The film includes the roadside memorial service organised by the Royal Air Forces Association in 2012 to commemorate the centenary of the disaster.

4 RAF Henlow & Sir Alan Cobham: Film from the 1920s shows Britain's first heavy bomber, the Vickers Virginia, taking part in trials when Henlow was the RAF's main parachute-test unit. Sir Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine, served there early in his career. In 1929, Hitchin was visited by the civil aviator Sir Alan Cobham during his nationwide tour to promote air travel.

5 How Hitchin got an airfield: In 1961 a local pilot Bill Bowker founded Farm Aviation (Hitchin) Ltd, one of the first aerial crop-spraying companies in the east of England. He later developed the Rush Green airstrip, three miles south of Hitchin where he traded as Bowker Air Services. An ardent conservationist, Bill retained an interest in the 40-acre airstrip long after his retirement from flying.

6 Brussel Rendezvous: Made in 1948, this was the first film produced by Hitchin Ciné Society. The choice of subject – how Hitchin-grown Brussels sprouts got from the fields to the dinner table – was a curious one but the film is valued now for images of the town and its people during the gloomy post-war period. There is also an interesting sequence of steam engines in the busy sidings at Hitchin railway station.

7 Hitchin Hoedown: This short film was shot in 1952 by Harry Cannon, the Hitchin sweet manufacturer, when BBC Radio came to the Town Hall to record one of their popular Square Dancing programmes. It was hosted by the cricket commentator Brian Johnston. As the original film was silent Sam Hallas has enlivened it with original hoedown music from the period and portraits of the characters who featured in Charles Chiltem's "Riders of the Range" programmes.

8 The Hitchin & Letchworth Carnival of 1969: A popular highlight during the 1960s and 70s, the carnival was run by the Local Yokels Association, a lively group of young men and women far removed from the country bumpkin image created by their title – as they proved each year by persuading companies, voluntary organisations and individuals to build floats, dress up and rattle tins to raise money for the local hospitals.

This 1969 film, by father and son team Dennis and Phil Coater and their friend Philip Bridge, caught the atmosphere beautifully. It opens with Brenda Walker and her team of Majorettes rehearsing in the playground of St Andrew's School, shortly before the building was demolished to make way for the Churchgate development in the 1970s.

9 We Make Gloves: This film about the Hitchin glove-making company Kir Gloves was shot by one of its employees, George Lawrence, a keen amateur cameraman. The factory occupied its site in Bury Mead Road from the time the industrial estate was built in the 1930s until the firm closed in 2001.

10 Building Priory Bypass: This film was also made by George Lawrence in 1982 to record the building of Hitchin's long-awaited bypass. Sam Hallas has provided a commentary and present-day pictures to accompany the original film.

11 Changing Hitchin: Apart from Priory Bypass, George Lawrence recorded other changes to the face of Hitchin that occurred between 1972 and 1990. Once again, Sam Hallas adds a commentary and his own present-day images of the changes that caught George's eye all those years ago.

12 Hitchin then and now: How other ciné enthusiasts recorded events and changes in Hitchin during the second half of the 20th century.

13 Sleepy Hollow: This 'slide show' film of Hitchin was made in the 1970s by a former minister of Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, the Reverend Robert Tebbut., who also voices the commentary. It had not been viewed for 40 years until it was re-discovered recently by his daughter.

14 Events on St. Mary's Square: When he was living at *The Bricklayers Arms* in Queen Street, George Bradford Best filmed several memorable events which took place on St Mary's Square during the 1940s and 50s. Among them was one of the last Boxing Day meets of the Hertfordshire Hunt before fox hunting was banned in England and Wales.

15 West Hill's Jubilee Street Party, June 1977: At this time Richard's parents, Tom and Roma Whitmore, were still living at 46 West Hill where he grew up. So when residents held their street party, he and Wendy were invited to judge the fancy hat competition and hand out prizes to race winners. A sudden heavy downpour threatened to ruin everything but fortunately all turned out well – as this video records. Also featured is the then Vicar of Hitchin, the Reverend Kenneth Jennings, seen dancing with Wendy.

16 A Royal Day to Remember: The final film on this DVD is the result of a community project commemorating June 14th 2012, when Queen Elizabeth II included Hitchin in the huge personal journey she undertook to meet as many of her subjects as possible during her Diamond Jubilee year. Through the kindness of many contributors Hitchin Historical Society has assembled some of the best images taken during that memorable morning when the Queen came to our market town.

Richard Whitmore, Film Archivist, Hitchin Historical Society