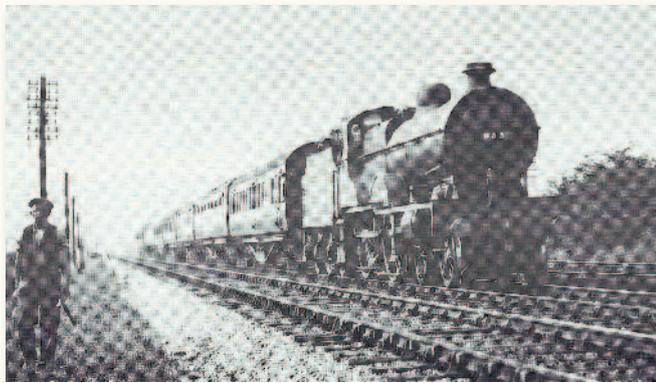


## “All Change!”

### 150 years of rail, from the past into the future

What if? What if the Midland Railway Company had not built a station at Elstree & Borehamwood when it opened its new line from Bedford to St. Pancras in July 1868?

Without a passenger rail service, the small rural village would not have grown into a town, the film studios would not have started to settle here from 1914, and the world might never have known the film and television classics created here.



Today passengers make an amazing 3.4 million journeys a year through Elstree & Borehamwood station, one of the busiest 5% of main line stations in the country. And with the second fastest projected growth in footfall of all the stations on its line, the railway's impact on the town will continue to increase.

To celebrate this milestone, so critical to our town, the “First Impressions” initiative plans an extensive programme of activities. Over the past nine years, the Town Council has worked with Hertsmere Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council, train operator Thameslink and local volunteer group Elstree Screen Heritage to make the station and other public spaces more attractive and welcoming, using high impact visuals from our unique film and television heritage.

But the 150th anniversary is the most ambitious challenge “First Impressions” has yet faced. With the support of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as funding from all the members of “First Impressions”, the Elstree & Borehamwood Museum is staging a



6-month exhibition about the impact of our railway, drawing on its collection and the knowledge of its volunteers and local residents.

Staff and students at the EUTC (Elstree University Technical College) have helped create a brief documentary film with highlights from interviews with railway veterans. During the exhibition further interviews will be filmed with other railway staff as well as with local residents.

The exhibition will even feature a mock railway waiting room and ticket office from the 1940s and a range of exhibits. Most of the railway items in the exhibition have been loaned by the St. Albans Signal Box Preservation Trust.



## A brief guide to the exhibition

Started in the early 19th century, British railways revolutionised how people lived, just as the advent of the age of the internet has done.

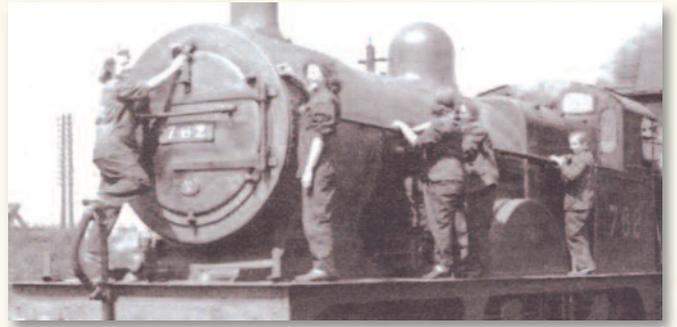
Elstree and Boreham Wood were farming communities of fewer than 300 people, living in just 50 houses, when in 1863 the Derby-based Midland Railway was granted 'Royal Assent' to extend its line from Bedford to London. On 13 July 1868 passenger services started running on what later became known as the Bed-Pan line.

The new Elstree station looked out over farmland, a few large houses... and little else. New industries and hopeful workers soon settled along the route of the railway, and within 30 years the local population had trebled.



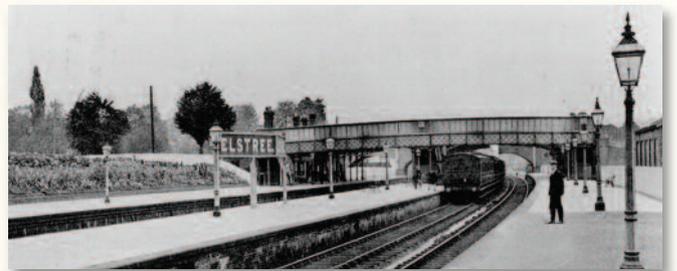
By 1914, houses and shops had been built on land north and south of Shenley Road, in Furzehill Road, Glenhaven Avenue and Malden Road. Along with shops, pubs, a post office, churches and emergency services came businessmen and industrial pioneers.

The pioneer town of Borehamwood was well away from London smog and offered cheap land with good transport connections, and in 1914 a new state-of-the-art industry arrived when Neptune Film Company opened Lits studio in Clarendon Road. The film industry was to become the key employer in Borehamwood for the next 100 years.



During the First World War, Hertfordshire became a vast training and transit camp, and trains carried troops to the ports. The railways were again pushed to the limit during the Second World War. Railway staff were 'essential workers', and many women were employed to fill the skills shortage.

But this was the beginning of the end for steam engines. To meet the needs of a nation returning to normality, the railways were nationalised in 1948, creating British Rail. As road transport became cheaper and more reliable for moving goods, by the mid-1960s a third of routes and stations had been closed (the Beeching Cuts) to reduce costs. By 1968, steam locomotives had gone, replaced by diesel engines. The Bed-Pan line was then electrified, although an industrial dispute over 'driver-only' operation delayed the new trains for nearly a year. Elstree & Borehamwood station also changed, replaced with temporary structures alongside Platform One and a ticket office in a small building on Allum Lane.



In 1993 it was decided to break up British Rail; by 1997 a private company, Railtrack, controlled the track, signalling, land and buildings while private franchisees ran rail services. GTR (Govia Thameslink Railway) took over the franchise in 2014 and the old forecourt was transformed into an integrated transport interchange.

Thameslink continues to invest in the rail system and the station, with new high-tech trains and lifts. The station building itself is being redeveloped.



## It's about the people too!

The story of the railway is not just about the trains. It's about the people: the people who run the station, sweep the floors, sell you tickets, maintain the track, drive the trains and operate the signals.

Trains and technology come and go, stations are demolished and rebuilt, but the dedicated people who have run the Bed-Pan line,

generation to generation, are the real champions behind the story of 150 Years of Rail at Elstree & Borehamwood.

The exhibition includes filmed interviews with several railway staff; highlights are shown below.

### Cliff Watts

Cliff joined the Midland Railway in 1940 (aged 17) as an engine cleaner. He became a fireman and then drove steam engines, diesels and electrics until he retired in 1968.

*"The best time on the railways was the steam days. The driver's money was just under £2 an hour and we didn't get any raises throughout the War."*

*"Steam engines? There were no two the same, and you could get 100 miles per hour coming downhill. But electrics? It was like driving a tram."*



### Bill Davies

In 1964 Bill joined as an engine cleaner in Nottingham, later becoming a driver. The Bed-Pan line started to be electrified on the same day he moved to Bedford.

A union rep for ASLEF (train drivers' union), Bill drove the first D.O.O. (Driver Only Operation) train from Bedford to St. Pancras in 1983.

*"I wanted to be an engine driver, but they don't let you start at the age of three so I had to wait a bit before I could start." "It's much better to drive the commuters to work because you're guaranteed a seat!"*

### Don O'Brien

Don joined the railway at Cricklewood in 1989 before working in stations at Luton, St. Albans and Kings Cross. He moved to Elstree & Borehamwood station 25 years ago and retired in 2016.

*"I was amazed to discover the railways had so many rules. Back in the 1980s it was like joining the army."*

*"Relations with customers are important, and I do like a bit of banter. I made some nice friends, and worked with a great team. I will miss them."*



### Siggy Cragwell

Siggy came to the UK from Barbados in 1962 to join British Rail, where he worked as a cleaner, a chargeman, a supervisor and in customer care, coming to Elstree in 2007.

### Paul Green

Born in Sheffield, Paul Green joined in 2000 in revenue protection at Kings Cross Thameslink, and has worked in customer care at Elstree since 2008.

*"Customers like to see a familiar face." "The biggest change is the amount of people who use the station; that's gone up every year. When I first came here we had three staff on duty; now we have platform staff, ticket office staff, and barrier staff."*

*"When things start going wrong you've just got to get in there and try to do the best you can."*



## But there's even more to our celebration

The exhibition will be held at the Elstree & Borehamwood Museum on the second floor of the Community Centre ("96 Shenley Road").

Admission is free and the exhibition will run from 23 January until 21 July. The Museum is open from noon to 6pm every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and from 10am to 3pm every Saturday.

In conjunction with the exhibition, student learning packs have been prepared for local primary schools.

The Library is also based at 96 Shenley Road and plans to create its own displays and possibly run railway-themed reading programmes.

There will be a free display of model railroad track layouts on Sunday 24 June in the hall at 96 Shenley Road, and possibly a second display in April when local model railway enthusiasts will be invited to display their track layouts at 96 Shenley Road.

The series of local walks known as "Teddy's Trails" have proved very popular and a new rail-themed trail will be added for the 150th anniversary. Guides to these trails can be found on the Town Council's web site and have been designed so that walkers can follow a trail without being part of a formal guided tour. The new trail will also have its own printed guide, but plans are being made to host a tour of the trail, starting with an orientation session at Allum Manor.

Other activities, including free screenings of railway-themed films made in the town's studios, are being planned and will be announced in "Town Crier".

The 150th anniversary will be a golden opportunity for Thameslink to share positive news with residents. As Stuart Cheshire, Passenger Services Director, says: "We're delighted to be involved in this very special anniversary. It's a fabulous coincidence and highly appropriate that 150 years after trains first started serving Elstree, the Thameslink Programme will be completed giving Elstree & Borehamwood a very real improvement in service with many additional services and new trains."

This year the Town Council's Summer Civic Festival will have the 150th anniversary as its theme (see page 34). Cllr. Sandra Parnell represents Elstree & Borehamwood Town Council on "First Impressions" and says: "The Town Council has successfully worked as part of "First Impressions" for many years, helping to achieve something remarkable in Borehamwood. To now be involved with celebrating 150 years of our railway station is something we are really excited about!"

If you have a strong interest in the railway and would like to contribute your memories or perhaps photos or other memorabilia, please let us know. You can contact Elstree Screen Heritage at [contact@ElstreeScreenHeritage.org](mailto:contact@ElstreeScreenHeritage.org) or simply leave a message at Fairway Hall, the Town Council's office in Brook Close.

*Bob Redman*

