

A Matter of Life and Death (1946), starring Kim Hunter and David Niven. One of the many gems in the BFI Archives

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# Secrets of our past

Over two weekends this month historic places, archives and museums in the county either normally closed to the public or fee paying open their doors for free special events. Here's a guide to get you exploring

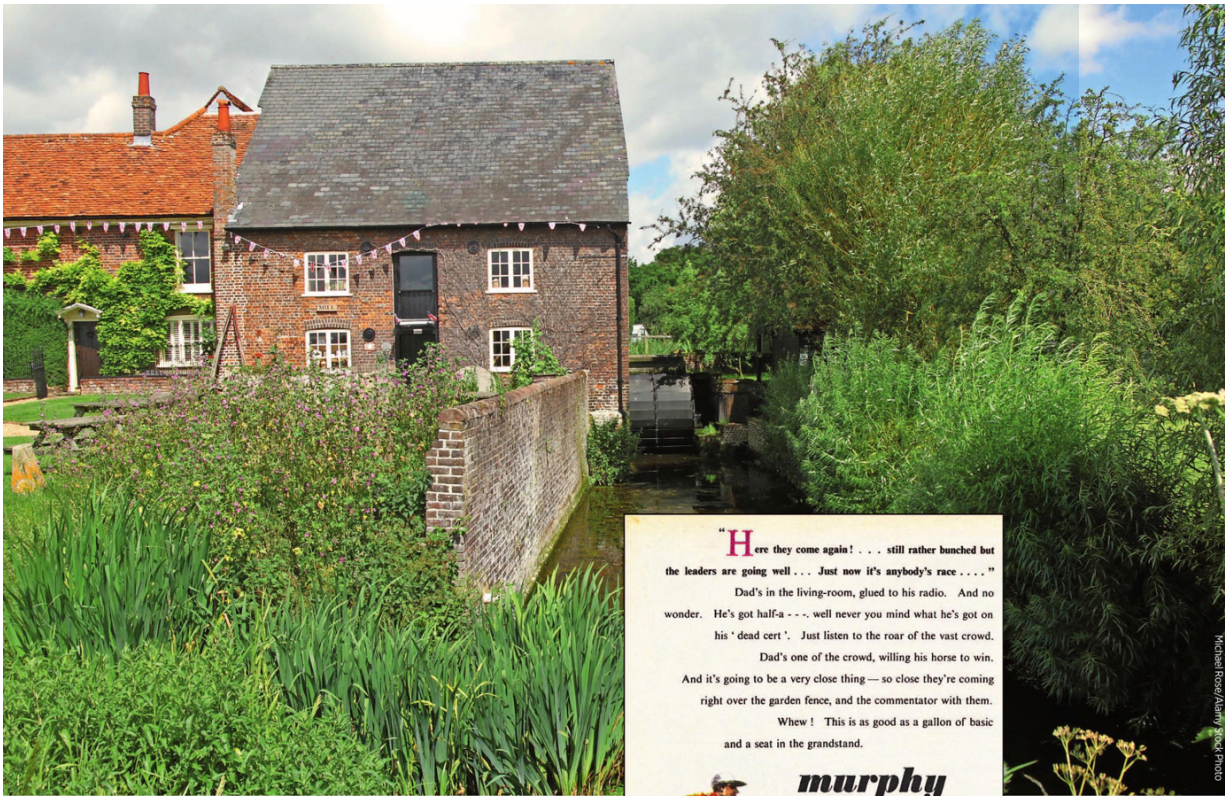
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Famous for Star Wars, Harry Potter, *EastEnders* and *Big Brother*, Hertfordshire's film studios have been central to the British TV and movie industries since the 1920s. But did you know that tucked out of sight at the edge of the county is a treasure-trove of footage which even ardent film fans might be unaware of – the British Film Institute's National Archive. Established in 1935 and

holding one of the largest film and TV collections in the world, it is not normally open to the public. But this month offers a rare chance to see inside the state-of-the-art vaults in Berkhamsted. Opening as part of the Heritage Open Days festival, exclusive behind-the-scenes tours, with demonstrations from curators and archivists, will show how the nation's favourite film and television collections are being

preserved for future generations.

Now in its 24th year, Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, offering visitors unique opportunities to explore places not often open, take part in special events, and get free access to venues which normally charge. Across two weekends this month, places representing the many ages of Hertfordshire will be taking part. Here's just a taste of what to expect: ▶



**"H**ere they come again! . . . still rather bunched but the leaders are going well . . . Just now it's anybody's race . . ."

Dad's in the living-room, glued to his radio. And no wonder. He's got half-a . . . well never you mind what he's got on his 'dead cert'. Just listen to the roar of the vast crowd. Dad's one of the crowd, willing his horse to win. And it's going to be a very close thing — so close they're coming right over the garden fence, and the commentator with them. Whew! This is as good as a gallon of basic and a seat in the grandstand.

**murphy**  
brings it home to you

Michael Rose/Alamy Stock Photo

**GETTING NOSTALGIC**

If the BFI archive tour leaves you hankering for more screen nostalgia, then head to Murphy TV and Radio Day at Mill Green Mill and Museum in Hatfield. Not just important as a filming location, the county has also played an important role in the manufacturing of media equipment. Based in Welwyn GC, the Murphy Radio company was one of the biggest employers in the country and produced what many will remember as the iconic television set of their childhood. Visitors can browse the collection of vintage TVs and radios, plus view an art exhibition, a talk about beekeeping, and take part in outdoor trails. It's all set in the grounds of a working windmill – a fantastic family day out.

**EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN**

2018 marks the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, which finally gave some British women the right to vote. As the inspiration for this year's

festival theme, *Extraordinary Women*, events will be celebrating remarkable women who've made an impact in all walks of life. Many are memorialised at Rectory Lane Cemetery, the detached burial ground of St Peter's in Berkhamsted, including a pioneering journalist, an educational philanthropist, and an innkeeper who made it all the way to the French Court at Versailles. A series of five guided tours around the art-filled grounds will tell visitors their amazing tales, with storytelling and clay modelling to keep youngsters entertained.

**INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

This year is also the 150th anniversary of the Midland Railway in St Albans. With fun interactive displays, the original signal controls to operate, and even a miniature steam railway to ride, the event at St Albans Signal Box and Railway Museum is one for train enthusiasts and families alike.

*In its mouse cabinet, the A100 measures only 9" x 4 1/2" x 7 1/2". But in performance it's way up among the big fellows. It has a powerful range on Long or Medium waves and highly selective tuning, with a reproduction that is astonishingly good. A.C. Mains only. Price £16.00 including purchase tax.*

Jeff Morgan/Alamy Stock Photo

Before railways, canals were the primary distribution network in the country. Today, not much remains of the county's Victorian wharves, which were once central to transporting manufactured goods, grain, coal and timber. An exclusive Heritage Open Days walking tour, *Discovering the Flourishing Industries of Yesteryear*, will let participants rediscover where these docks once stood on a trail of canals between Boxmoor and Tring. The role of the local port, and the technology which allowed locks to be built, will also be revealed.

At Redbournbury Watermill, between St Albans and Redbourn, the county's manufacturing past is still very much alive, with a fully operational mill and on-site bakery. Visitors can experience 18th century milling demonstrations and see the artisan baking process, using stone-ground flours from the mill, just as bakers would have done 300 years ago.

**CASTLES & ROYAL HISTORY**

A series of events in Berkhamsted



will chart the history of the town's most important buildings, and their royal connections. Originally built by William the Conqueror's half-brother and now owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, visitors to Berkhamsted Castle (above) can take a guided tour of the motte and bailey. Now in ruins after its materials were

repurposed to build a manor house for the keeper of Queen Elizabeth I's jewels, that building also fell in time – demolished in the 1960s. Participants on *A Walk into the Past: Berkhamsted Place, Successor to the Castle* will learn about the dramatic rise and fall of the buildings on the estate and their fascinating stories.

**TOP LEFT:** Redbournbury Watermill on the river Ver near St Albans – visitors can experience 18th century milling and baking

**LEFT:** 1940s magazine advert for Murphy Radio, based in Welwyn GC. Head to Mill Green Mill and Museum for a day dedicated to this key player in the TV and radio industry

**RIGHT:** Control the original signals and more at St Albans Signal Box and Railway Museum

**TOP RIGHT:** Take a guided tour of Berkhamsted Castle as part of a series exploring the town's key historic buildings



St Albans Signal Box and Railway Museum



Shangara Singh/Alamy Stock Photo



**EXPLORE ARCHITECTURE**

History enthusiasts can also delve far back into the county's past with a visit to Hertford's oldest building. St Leonard's (left) is an unusually well-preserved 12th century church and, complete with medieval wall paintings and floor tiles, it's a rare example of a surviving Norman structure.

From the medieval period to the 20th century, participants on a guided walking tour around Bishop's Stortford will get to see *Seven Churches in One Day*, while St Albans Cathedral tower tours are another opportunity to admire ecclesiastical architecture. Visitors climbing the 211 steps to the top of the tower will get an up-close look at the stained glass in the rose window, the bells in the ringing chamber, and be rewarded with stunning panoramic views across the city's skyline and the countryside beyond.

Once described as 'The best classical house in Watford', Little Cassiobury House (above) will also be open. With volunteers on hand to explain the ongoing work to convert the building

**ABOVE:** Grade II\* listed Little Cassiobury House, Watford

**LEFT:** St Leonard's in Hertford – an unusually well-preserved Norman church

**BELOW:** Queen Anne's Summerhouse at Old Warden

into a local community centre, visitors will get a glimpse into the building's history while learning about its exciting future. ♦

*Heritage Open Days is funded by the National Trust and People's Postcode Lottery. It takes place on September 6-9 and 13-16. Every event is free. Find out more about these events and times, along with full regional and national listings, at [heritageopendays.org.uk](http://heritageopendays.org.uk)*

**THREE OPEN DAY HIGHLIGHTS IN NEIGHBOURING AREAS**

**Strawberry Hill House: Finding the Lost Treasures, London**  
Learn about the task of finding the collections of Horace Walpole – art historian, man of letters, antiquarian and Whig politician – for an upcoming exhibition, which will see them displayed in their original home for the first time in 170 years. With an exclusive talk by the Twickenham house's curator.

**Queen Anne's Summerhouse, Bedfordshire**  
Be charmed by this delightful 18th century folly (left) set in the woodlands of the Shuttleworth Estate at Old Warden, normally only accessible as a holiday home.

**Gibberd Garden, Essex**  
Explore a unique Grade II listed garden in Harlow, whimsically filled with architectural salvage and sculptures, designed by celebrated architect Sir Frederick Gibberd.

