

# Filming on the Line

## 27 August Gold

At the 1948 Olympic Games in London, India achieved the distinction of winning its first gold medal as an independent nation – in hockey. Balbir Singh, the team's centre forward, is widely regarded as one of the best hockey players of all time, and his part in the 1948 victory was the central theme of the film, a Bollywood extravaganza, part of which was filmed overnight at Sheffield Park station.

Bollywood superstar and hearthrob Akshay Kumar took the starring role, and spent the night orbited by devoted acolytes, fetching him whatever he wanted and assiduously fanning away flies. Sheffield Park became Amritsar Junction, where the train from Lahore is stopped specially to allow the Punjabi hockey team to board. In a Bollywood movie, it appears, atmosphere is more important than tedious geographical and historical accuracy – the Indian train was hauled by the Q Class with four blood and custard Mk.1s; the engine was disguised by covering the boiler with flour and water to represent limescale and the smokebox with cocoa powder and water to look like rust, and it was fitted with a headlight. Indian destination boards were added to the carriages, and the platform was crowded with Indian stalls and bustling extras – and anyway it was fairly dark, so it all looked fine.



## 18 September Nasty Women

In the 1988 comedy *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, two down and out con artists engage in a 'Loser Leaves Town' contest – in the recent rehash of the story, the con artists are women instead of men, played by Anne Hathaway and Rebel Wilson.

All the action of the railway scenes took place in the blacked out carriage shed at Sheffield Park inside Pullman Car *Fingall*, aboard a train travelling to Paris. In order to simulate movement a 'rocking crew' was employed to rock *Fingall* from side to side for the duration of the shot.

## 3 October Cathedrals of Steam

A French and German TV company made the story of St Pancras station from the Victorian era to the end of steam. Various scenes for the documentary were filmed at Sheffield Park and around the railway in order to illustrate the story. *Camelot* was filmed in the loco running shed as representative of an engine from the last days of steam, and *Fingall* took the part of a Pullman car patronised by the royal family. They were served tea by porter Roger Simmons, wearing his porter's uniform with a white cloth over his arm. This little vignette was cooked up to illustrate the point



ABOVE: A new running-in board.

LEFT: India comes to Sheffield Park for Gold.



Indian props at the ready for Gold.

that the royal trains never departed from St Pancras, but always from Kings Cross.

The Staplehurst crash, in which Charles Dickens was involved, was also mentioned. He had been writing *Our Mutual Friend* at the time, and was looking through the manuscript at the time of the crash, so this scene was vividly illustrated with the scattering of paper onto the track – unfortunately, the pages chosen were typewritten, which struck the first blow for authenticity. The second was the fact that the manuscript pages were unharmed, Dickens having travelled in one of the carriages that remained upright, and he returned to it later to rescue the pages in question intact.

The crew of S15 No 847 were filmed cooking breakfast on the footplate, apropos of nothing to do with St Pancras, but something that the European film crew considered to be 'typically English'.

Filming for this programme also took place on a number of other large stations on the continent and in the pumping station at Crossness.

## 11 October Christopher Robin

This Disney feature film concentrates on the life of the adult Christopher Robin and the scenes at the Bluebell were about C Robin the grown-up returning to the Hundred Acre Wood in order to be reunited with Pooh and his friends. C Robin was played by Ewan McGregor, with Hayley Atwell as his wife Evelyn and Bronte Carmichael as their daughter Madeline.

Sheffield Park became Hartfield station (played by Horsted Keynes in the recent release *Goodbye Christopher Robin*) with a train of three Maunsells hauled by No 847, minus smoke deflectors, with the station and the train 'dirted down' to represent BR in the 1950s. In the first scene, C Robin alights from the train, carrying Pooh. Just as the train departs again, Pooh spots a red balloon caught in a carriage door and takes hold of it as they walk away. In the second scene, Madeline, having arrived at the station by bicycle, buys a ticket to London at the booking office and picks up a map of London before catching the train. Her mother, Evelyn, then arrives in the car and spots Madeline's bike outside the station, rushing out onto the platform just as the train pulls out.

Lineside shots were taken of C Robin's journey to Sussex, with the scenery through which the train passed very carefully set out, with the help of local farmers. Field 1 contained 64 sheep, Field 2 a scarecrow, a woman and two dogs, Field 3 a man and a dog, Field 4 seventeen cows and Field 5 three horses. One hopes that they all remembered to stand in the right place and collected the going rate as extras.

## ON THE SCREEN Goodbye Christopher Robin

The film told the story of the distant relationship between CR and his father A A Milne until CR's nanny had to go and care for her dying mother, and Milne was forced