

Lights, camera, deer... action!

By Richard Gray

Close your eyes and picture a 19th century gypsy encampment, or a vintage Rolls-Royce driven by a violent gangster, or Henry VIII hunting with his courtiers, or a runaway steam train!

Then imagine a star-studded cast – Richard Burton, Julie Walters, Mick Jagger, Julie Christie, James Fox, Rob Brydon, Genevieve Bujold, Jude Law, Jennifer Saunders, Robert Downey Jnr, Meryl Streep and David Attenborough.

But the star of this fantasy film is Richmond Park, a favourite location for the film industry for nearly 70 years. The Park's photogenic beauty and its proximity to central London and to studios at Ealing, Shepperton, Pinewood and Twickenham mean it is an ideal location.

The Titfield Thunderbolt (1953) was an Ealing Studios comedy, starring Stanley Holloway and John Gregson. Although mostly filmed around Somerset and Dorset, it's understood that two scenes were filmed in Richmond Park: a crash on Sawyer's Hill between a bus and a police van and... a runaway train!



Jump forward 65 years to new British comedy *Patrick* co-starring Beattie Edmondson and Ed Skrein (above photo ©Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures UK), with Jennifer Saunders, Adrian Scarborough and Cheri Lunghi. *Patrick* is set almost entirely around Richmond with the Park featuring prominently. The story was inspired by a local dog-walker.

Richmond Park has long been associated with historical dramas; the most notable was *Anne of the Thousand Days*, starring Richard Burton and Genevieve Bujold as Anne Boleyn (both actors were Oscar nominated in 1970). Look out for Richmond Park as Henry and his courtiers engage in hunting expeditions.

Right middle photo: Police van and coach collide on Sawyer's Hill in *The Titfield Thunderbolt*. Courtesy Studiocanal DVD.



Two years earlier, one of the Borough's most notable residents, Rolling Stone Mick Jagger, made his acting debut in *Performance* playing a reclusive, eccentric rock star. James Fox also stars as an East End gangster seen driving a Rolls-Royce through the Park. A critical flop on release, the film is now recognised as a gritty crime classic.

Merchant-Ivory's biggest hit, *Heat and Dust* (Julie Christie, Greta Scacchi, Shashi Kapoor, Julian Glover) improbably used the Park in 1983 to recreate a dust storm although after this summer perhaps it's not so surprising.

In 2014, Meryl Streep starred with James Corden and Emily Blunt in the fantasy-musical *Into the Woods* using the Park for several scenes, and the Royal Ballet School was seen in *Billy Elliot* (Julie Walters, Jamie Bell).



The most commercially successful film with Park involvement is *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). Starring Robert Downey Jnr in the title role with Jude Law as Doctor Watson, this fun romp used an area near Pond Plantation to recreate a gypsy encampment where our heroes enjoy a hedgehog goulash... (not hedgehogs from the Park, we hasten to add!)



Above photo: Richmond Park set-up for the stag National Nature Reserve beetle filming sequence.

Apart from movies the Park has featured in TV shows such as *Marion and Geoff* (with local Rob Brydon), *Silent Witness* (2012), *New Tricks* (2013) and recent smash hit *The Crown*. News and documentary programmes have also been filmed there, including *Springwatch* and *Blue Peter*.

Last, but by no means least, our own *Richmond Park National Nature Reserve* not only became a double award winner but also featured everyone's favourite TV legend: Sir David Attenborough.

Top photo: *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* with Robert Downey Jnr as Sherlock and Jude Law (with top hat) as Watson, at the gypsy encampment. Courtesy of Warner Home Entertainment DVD.