

# Campaign to save Ewell Village's Glyn Hall

12 June 2024



Tucked away in the heart of **Ewell Village** is **Glyn Hall**, a not-for-profit community space providing a venue for local organisations, including those linked to the arts, music and education. Glyn Hall also caters for social gatherings, society meetings, birthday parties and exercise classes for all generations. Located at 3a Cheam Road in Ewell Village, Glyn Hall has served the local community for over a century.

The precise age of Glyn Hall is not known but it is thought to have been built between 1866 and 1894. Archived records show that during this time **Sir Arthur Glyn** had a small wooden building built for his daughter, **Margaret Henrietta Glyn** to practice playing her music in and it is thought that this building was the original to the little green hut that now stands at 3a Cheam Road.

Margaret Henrietta Glyn, the last member of Ewell's Glyn dynasty and a champion of conservation of the local area's heritage, bequeathed Glyn Hall, which had been used by the Adult Education movement since the 1920s to the people of Ewell Village just before she died in 1946.

**Mike Ralph**, a retired blacksmith from Ewell Village knows Glyn Hall well and has commented as follows:

'My parents and grandparents were very involved with The Adult School at Glyn Hall until the 1960s. They held social events such as beetle-drives and whist-drives. My father would give talks about blacksmithing and his great passion, astrology. The family also arranged for other speakers to present at The Adult School.'

Lovingly looked after by volunteers, Glyn Hall has played a key role in local life ever since it was generously gifted to the village, but despite the best endeavours of the volunteers, the building has now sadly reached the end of its long life.

Determined to stop the hall being sold to developers and the space irretrievably lost, a new group of volunteers has stepped in to save the much-loved community hub that is as original and independent as the area it serves.

Unlike other halls in the area, Glyn Hall is not a religious or a commercial enterprise, but a community hall available 365 days of the year for members of the community to use and enjoy for a minimal fee.



Despite the age-related problems with the current structure, Glyn Hall is now set for an exciting new chapter, as preparations are made to replace the original structure with a modern, sustainable and fit-for-purpose design that is built for the future, whilst respectfully honouring the past. Boasting a large hall, kitchen facilities and meeting space, the new not-for-profit venue will provide the backdrop for a range of local gatherings - from social clubs and society meetings to exercise classes and birthday parties.

Having worked tirelessly to secure planning permission and with £90k in funding already in the bank, the volunteer trustees must now raise a further £300k to construct the new hall and are appealing to the public for donations.

Every donation received by the volunteers overseeing the project takes them one step closer to realising their dream of creating a space where the community can meet and make memories for generations to come. The names of financial donors will be displayed inside the new building unless they wish to remain anonymous.

Margaret Glyn left a precious gift to the people of Ewell that the volunteers are working hard to replace in a way that she would have approved of. The volunteers believe that there is a duty to protect the space occupied by Glyn Hall, thereby retaining its place at the heart of the community and extending its legacy for the future.

To find out more about the history, project and fundraising, please visit [www.glynhallewell.co.uk](http://www.glynhallewell.co.uk).

Ewell Village Hall Registered Charity No: 305031

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## Surrey's corpse railway and death in Victorian times

12 June 2024



The Victorians treated death very differently to people today and would photograph their deceased alongside living members of their family, take locks of hair from the departed and seal it in jewellery, (which they would wear) display

bronze figures of dead animals in their homes and make plaster death masks from the faces of the dead.

If like me, you are fascinated by the Victorians' treatment of death, then you will be pleased to learn that a rare opportunity has arisen to find out all about Victorian gravestones, mourning traditions and spiritualist experiments in art and writing.

This is because researchers from the **University of Surrey** and the **Surrey Arts and Humanities Network** are offering a family-friendly event series exploring the Victorian culture of death and memorialisation.

Included in the event series is an exploration of the legacy of the **London Necropolis Railway** and a craft afternoon at the Watts Gallery.

Dr Lucy Ella Rose, Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Surrey, believes that:

"Memorialisation is a cornerstone of how we engage with the past, understand the present and shape the future".

When referring to the events organised, Dr Rose stated that:

"The series offers a unique opportunity to explore our county's and indeed, our country's rich variety of Victorian memorials, from traditional gravestones and grand statues to mourning attire and the artistic expressions of grief."

Family-friendly events to be held across Surrey include:

- **Surrey History Centre** (Saturday 8 June): Immerse yourself in informative talks and delve into the archives that unveil the lives commemorated in Victorian memorials.
- **Watts Gallery - Artists' Village** (Saturday 29 June): Participate in a "crafternoon" session, drawing inspiration from Victorian mourning practices and artistic expressions of remembrance.

When discussing the forthcoming family-friendly events, Dr Rose stated that:

"Surrey boasts a rich history of memorialisation, having served as the destination for London's Necropolis Railway, a transportation line dedicated to carrying bodies for burial. The London Necropolis Railway was opened in 1854 by the London Necropolis Company (LNC) to carry corpses and mourners between London and the LNC's newly opened Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey. At the time, Brookwood Cemetery was the largest cemetery in the world, designed to be large enough to accommodate all the deaths in London for centuries to come".



Trains carried coffins and passengers from a dedicated station in Waterloo, London along the tracks of the London and South Western Railway with the compartments of the trains, both for the living and for the dead passengers being partitioned by religion and class.

The London Necropolis Railway did not close until 11 April 1941 and Dr Lucy Rose and her colleagues do not believe that these gothic, but fascinating stories should be forgotten and that is why The Epsom and Ewell Times is delighted to be able to assist with the promotion of the series.

For further information and the full event schedule, please visit the "Victorian Memorials" website:

<https://victorianmemorials.wordpress.com>

Image: Post mortem photo of a peaceful-looking woman. Attribution (CC BY 2.0)

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## Antiques Roadshow's poor sign of value?

12 June 2024



In my article of 30 July 2023, I reported on the sale of a 4-inch high Japanese cloisonne vase at auction after it had been purchased for only a couple of pounds in an Epsom High Street charity shop.

Readers may recall that the charity shop find referred to sold for many thousands of pounds, so when I discovered that one of my own charity shop finds was identical to a bronze wild boar that featured in an episode of the BBC's Antiques Roadshow TV programme, I became very excited.

Upon discovering that my *porcine* statuette was Roman and potentially worth ten thousand pounds, I positioned it away from Dobby, my cat on a much higher shelf so it would not get knocked over and damaged.

The Antiques Roadshow expert advised the young man who dug up his bronze Roman wild boar as a child to report his find, but who should anyone in Surrey report similar finds to?

Dr Simon Maslin FSA ACIfA is the Finds Liaison Officer for Surrey who works on behalf of the Portable Antiquities Scheme for Surrey County Council at the Surrey History Centre in Woking, Surrey.

The role of Dr Maslin is to identify archaeological finds in England and Wales, but this does not include charity shop finds with no secure provenance like my bronze boar.

Dr Maslin is unable to consider finds unless they are archaeological items found (not bought) locally and he cannot provide assistance with valuations.



The items considered therefore include my metal detecting finds eg the medieval cruciform pendants shown in the photo because Dr Maslin is the point of contact for items that people may find when metal detecting, gardening or out walking etc which may be part of the local archaeological record. He is also the person to contact for any finds which need reporting under the 1996 Treasure Act.

If Dr Simon Maslin had appeared on the BBC's Antiques Roadshow TV programme, he would have been quick to tell the millions of people watching at home that the bronze boar identical to the one I found in a charity shop was not Roman and that it was in fact of far eastern origin, most probably Javanese and a modern reproduction that is only worth a few pounds - not ten thousand pounds as claimed by the Antiques Roadshow expert (pigs may fly).

If nothing else, my miniature, bronze Javanese wild boar figure has become a conversation piece that has enabled me to

write this article about who to contact when real Roman artifacts are dug up in a garden.

My bronze wild boar has now been returned to its original position on a lower shelf, as I no longer live in fear of Dobby the cat knocking it over.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme website and database can be accessed through the British Museum's website at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk).

Related Reports:

Urning a big profit on rare Epsom find

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## The Great Escape - New Unpublished Evidence

12 June 2024



A man from Ewell was involved in the Great Escape. He was caught and executed. 80 years to the day of the Great Escape The History Detectorist tells his story.

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80 years ago today, on the night of 24 March 1944, more than 200 captured Allied aircrew attempted to escape from Stalag Luft III, a Prisoner of War camp located in an area of Nazi Germany that is now part of Poland.

The attempt was the culmination of many months of careful preparation, including the digging of a narrow tunnel more than 330 feet in length which formed the subject of the 1963 blockbuster movie, "The Great Escape" starring Steve McQueen, James Garner and Richard Attenborough.

Of the 76 Allied prisoners who escaped from Stalag Luft III, 3 managed to get home to the UK and 23 were returned to POW camps.

The other 50 men were murdered in cold blood by the Gestapo. One of those murdered was 106173 Ft/Lt John Francis Williams from Ewell, Surrey who lived with his parents in Stoneleigh Park Road.

John was only aged 26 years old when he was executed contrary to the Geneva Convention. Prior to the outbreak of World War 2 he had worked for the Milk Marketing Board. He belonged to the Lyric Players in Wimbledon and was keen on photography and driving his blue MG sports car (a photo he took of his girlfriend leaning against his MG sports car is shown below). John volunteered for the RAF and was stationed at Dereham, Prestwick and Rainham.



John inside a WW2 aircraft

Disappointed that he did not become a pilot, he instead became an observer on Boston Bombers. He was with 107 Squadron when his Boston III was shot down on 27 April 1942 and upon being captured he was sent to Stalag Luft III.

John's family were made aware that he was missing on the 4 May 1942, but did not know if he was safe and well until the end of May 1942.

On the 10 June 1942 there was a knock on the door of his girlfriend's home by a lady looking for her.

The lady had heard a request from John on German radio for anyone listening to the broadcast to contact his girlfriend and to tell her where he could be contacted.

The subsequent correspondence exchanged between John and his girlfriend is not only historically significant, but it also tells the story of an enduring love between a young couple, which with the assistance of Bourne Hall Museum in Ewell, Surrey we would like to give people the opportunity to read about for the first time on this, the 80th anniversary of "The Great Escape".

In a letter to his girlfriend dated 11 June 1942 John revealed that boredom was an issue, but that he had started to learn German, Spanish and Italian, whilst sunbathing more than he had ever done previously.

John's letter to his girlfriend confirmed that he shared a hut with 5 other officers and that they all cooked their own food, some of which was supplemented by the contents of Red Cross food parcels.



John's girlfriend

John did not lose any of his sense of humour and wrote, "Some well-known people in this camp, Wing Commander Bader, Stamford-Tuck, Eyre and me!"

At the time of writing again, John had received 4 letters from his girlfriend and another 3 from family members, but he was only permitted to write 3 letters and 4 postcards in response each month.

In his correspondence, John provides details of camp life and the prisoners' daily routine. Breakfast was between 9 and 9.30 am, lunch was at 12.30 pm, they had a cup of tea between 1.30 pm and 2 pm, tea at 4 pm, dinner between 7 pm and 8.30 pm and another cup of tea at 11 pm. John added, however, that "It's not as much as it sounds" and went on to explain that there were a lot of classes and lectures for him to attend. John missed the everyday things that people often take for granted "like riding on a trolley bus and seeing a film".

On 7 September 1942, John wrote to his girlfriend and enclosed a photo of himself with one of the other officers he was sharing a hut with. John borrowed a camera from a German officer in order to take the photo.

In the same letter John complained that he had run out of hair oil and had been trying alternatives without success. "I have stopped parting my hair on the side so it now falls in soft waves PHEW!" he wrote.

In many of his letters John asked for photographs to be sent to him and he positioned these on the wall around his bed.

In his letter of 25 September 1942 John informed his girlfriend that the amount of mail he could send home each month had been reduced to 2 letters and 2 postcards. He also told his girlfriend that a fellow prisoner, Ft/O Zakazewski had drawn her using one of her photos. Drawing classes were held and many sketches and drawings exist of the camp.

In his letter of 2 November 1942 John wrote about around 500 officers going over to the sergeant's compound to see "French Without Tears", a show written and performed by POWs, which he found entertaining.

There had been quite a lot of snow and a white Christmas was anticipated, but despite only being early November, John

wished his girlfriend a happy Christmas in case she did not get to hear for him for a while.

On 13 December 1942, John wrote to his girlfriend telling her that he had received another 29 letters from her and therefore had 147 letters in total which she had sent him. A Red Cross parcel had arrived with a Christmas pudding inside it which they were all looking forward to eating. John was also attending church services and added, "This morning brought forth another of our usual good service and very good padre".

John confirmed that spirits were high and that they had flooded a football pitch to create an ice rink, on which the Canadian officers could play ice hockey in the afternoons. They had a merry time over Christmas and New Year as they were given 3.5 litres of beer at Christmas and another 1.75 litres for New Year. John had grown a moustache, but shaved it off when it developed twirly ends.

On 29 March 1943, John sent a postcard telling his girlfriend he was due to be moved to another compound within the camp. The camp was becoming overcrowded and had to be enlarged. As the weather was getting warmer and John did not have enough pairs of shorts to wear, he complained about not receiving the right clothes for the right seasons. He had taken up gardening and had planted seeds in order to grow onions, carrots, spinach, and lettuces. The soil in the new compound was much better than in the previous compound John had spent time in and John remarked that there he had only managed to grow one radish.

By June 1943, John was giving elementary German lessons and had grown nine tomato plants which he was very proud of.

John's girlfriend had been to the dentist so in his letter of 20 July 1943 he wrote that he hoped she "held his hand spiritually" and went on to recount a visit to the dentist in the camp who told him "That he had good teeth for an Englishman".

John went on to ask for a picture of his girlfriend wearing sunglasses and expressed concern over the fact that she might be called up to serve her country.

John had had an attack of appendicitis and was waiting to find out if he was going to be operated on.

John confirmed in his letter of 20th July 1943 that on 13th September 1942 he had been promoted to Ft/Lt Williams.



John and his MG sports car

On the 24th July 1943, John confirmed that he had had his appendix removed in a nearby French Prisoner of War Camp Hospital and that he was due to spend the next nine weeks recovering.

On 29th September 1943, John wrote in a communication to his girlfriend, "I am sure I shall be holding you in my arms again, looking into your eyes seeing that lovely smile of yours". His girlfriend had been to the Rembrandt cinema in Ewell, Surrey, which he had fond memories of, and he hoped that they would soon be able to visit the Rembrandt cinema together.

John had seen a production of "George and Margaret" at the camp, "You should have seen the leading ladies," he wrote. His girlfriend asked whether she should postpone the celebration of her 21st birthday on 13th March the following year until he got home. Initially, he told her not to, but by his next letter on the 24th October 1943, he had changed his mind and expressed a desire for her to do so if she did not mind.

During December 1943, John told his girlfriend about plays and classical concerts that had taken place at the camp and about how the prisoners had built their own theatre. "I wish you could see our theatre, all our own work; it has 350 armchair seats made from tea-type plywood chests in which the Canadian food parcels come," he wrote. There was also a fad among POWs to design their ideal homes, he explained.

In mid-February 1944, John lovingly wrote, "I'm sure it won't be long now, my love, before we are together again and then we must endeavour to make up for lost time, mustn't we? I'm sure you won't mind me telling you this, but recently I've felt a little lonely, my darling, I miss you so very, very much; your letters are a wonderful antidote for the gloom and I love

receiving them. I spent yesterday afternoon framing a couple of pictures of you, a very pleasant way to pass time which seems to bring you very close to me.”

John passed on news to his girlfriend from a family friend whose daughter’s husband had been killed in December 1943 while serving in the RAF. The couple had only been married since June 1943, and prior to that, the daughter had been engaged to a merchant shipping captain who was killed when his ship was torpedoed.



John’s final resting place

John’s final postcard to his girlfriend was written on the same day of the escape and contained the message “I hope to see you soon!”

Sadly, John would never be reunited with his girlfriend and was not able to find a way back home to celebrate her 21st birthday with her as he had planned.

John was last seen alive on the 6th April 1944 before being brutally murdered by the Gestapo under the direct orders of Adolf Hitler and cremated at Breslau.

John is remembered with Honour at Poznan Old Garrison Cemetery in the west of Poland and was mentioned in Despatches.

The notes John’s girlfriend kindly allowed the curators of Bourne Hall Museum in Ewell, Surrey, to make in 2015, when she lent John’s letters and postcards to the museum, also help to keep John’s memory alive because without them it would not have been possible to write this article.

Even with the considerable passage of time, John’s girlfriend never wanted to be parted from his correspondence, so it is a great privilege for us to be able to refer to the historically significant parts of the letters and postcards sent by John from Stalag Luft III.

80 years after The Great Escape, John and his girlfriend’s love story continues in the hearts and minds of the people who read about it, regardless of the country in which they live.

This article is therefore as much about an enduring love as it is about one of the most talked-about events of World War 2.

Top photo: John in his MG sports car.

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# Spitfire downed Messerschmitt over Epsom

12 June 2024



What connects Epsom's Market Square statue of Emily Davison and the Spitfire that shot down a German Messerschmitt over the Town in World War 2?

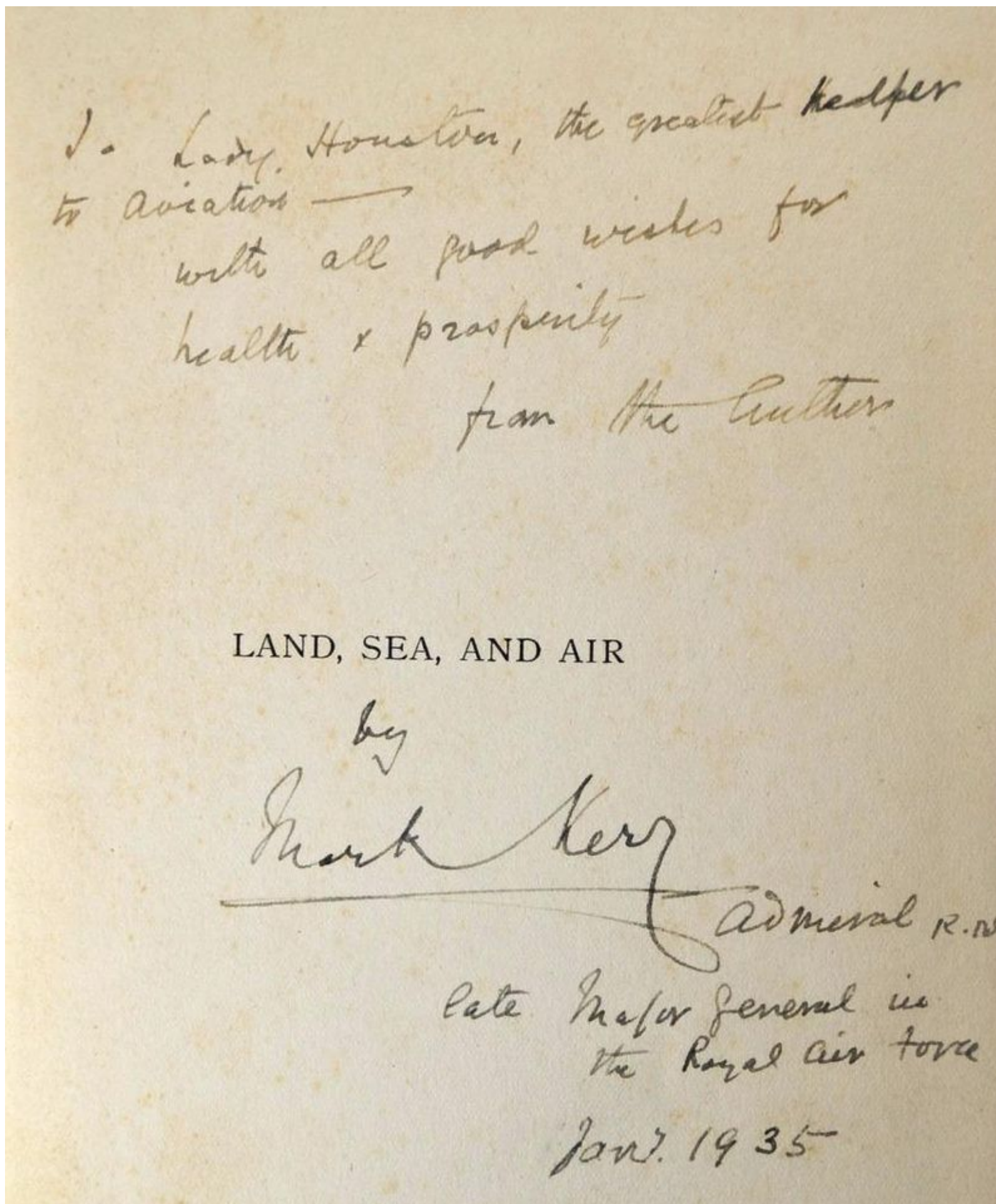
"WW2 People's War" is an archive of World War 2 memories that have been documented by the public and gathered by the BBC.

A gentleman who was a young boy living in West Hill, Epsom when war was declared in 1939 contributed to the archive in 2003 and referred to the time a Supermarine Spitfire flew down Epsom High Street:

"I remember a German Messerschmitt flying very low along Epsom High Street, coming down over the Clock Tower. It was heading towards Ewell and being chased by a Spitfire. Everyone ran into the shops to take cover. The aircraft was shot down by the Spitfire over Epsom Downs; the pilot bailed out and was captured".

It seems likely that the Supermarine Spitfire flew over the space now occupied by the bronze statue of the suffragette, Emily Davison and if this is indeed the case then the statue of Emily Davison also serves as a reminder of an almost forgotten suffragette who played a major role in the development of the iconic Supermarine Spitfire that was only just created in time for The Battle of Britain in 1940.

I have to be honest and admit to not knowing who the forgotten suffragette referred to above was until I commenced researching the life and career of Admiral Mark Kerr and acquired an old book from an online auction site.



The first photo shows the inscription I was amazed to find inside the book which was written by Admiral Mark Kerr, who was one of the founders of The Royal Air Force and who had been beaten by Alcock and Brown in the race to fly across the Atlantic Ocean in 1919.

The book was therefore given to Lady Houston by its author, Admiral Mark Kerr and it was Admiral Mark Kerr who described Lady Houston as "the greatest helper to aviation", but who was Lady Houston and why was she so highly respected?

Lady Lucy Houston had been a suffragette and in 1931 donated the £100,000 funding the Government refused to give Supermarine and the aircraft designer, Reginald Mitchell (see the film "The First of the Few" on You Tube) allowing the RAF to win the Schneider Trophy and Reginald Mitchell to make inroads into the creation of the Supermarine Spitfire which came just in time for The Battle of Britain.

In 1933 Lady Houston financed the Houston - Mount Everest flight expedition, in which aircraft flew over the summit of Mount Everest for the first time - a feat Admiral Mark Kerr had previously claimed could not be achieved until 2018 at the earliest.

Lady Lucy Houston was therefore instrumental in the development of the Supermarine Spitfire and in aviation advancements that enabled man to fly over Mount Everest much sooner than anticipated. It is for this reason I believe that Admiral Mark Kerr, one of the founders of the RAF referred to Lady Houston as being "the greatest helper to aviation" in 1935 when gifting her this book one year prior to her death.



The book was Admiral Mark Kerr's own copy because he made some amendments inside it which only he would have known to have made.

Without Lady Lucy Houston's generous £100,000 donation to Supermarine and Reginald Mitchell the Supermarine Spitfire would not have been ready in time for The Battle of Britain and the consequences could have been very serious indeed.

Admiral Mark Kerr, one of the founders of The Royal Air Force clearly wanted to thank Lady Houston for her endeavours whilst acknowledging the fact that she proved him wrong re flying over Mount Everest by giving her the book I later acquired from a well-known online auction site with the inscribed page shown above inside it.

The bronze statue of Emily Davison is suitably positioned in Epsom's Market Square to remind us of the Supermarine Spitfire that once flew over the Clock Tower in defence of our town, which would probably have never been created if it had not been for the enormous generosity of one of Emily Davison's fellow women's rights campaigners - the remarkable Lady Lucy Houston.

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## Grate find in Epsom's Millennium Green

12 June 2024



The Woodcote Millennium Green is unique in Surrey. It comprises of an area of 7 acres, bounded by Woodcote Green Road to the north and the Woodcote Estate to the south and is located at the rear of Epsom General Hospital.

The land forming The Woodcote Millennium Green has passed through the ownership of monks, lords and developers over the last thousand years and now flourishes under the stewardship of a Trust whose members are passionate to retain the character of this landscape gem.

The land was originally part of the estate of the Manor of Horton, owned by Chertsey Abbey until the dissolution of the lesser monasteries in 1536-7. After passing through several owners, the Manor passed to the sister-in-law of John Evelyn, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century diarist. Woodcote House was re-built at this period, on a site which is now just south of the Millennium

Green.

Woodcote House was acquired by Sir Edward Northey (1652-1723) in the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century and became the family seat to the Northey family for 250 years. The present house dates mainly from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Photographs of the area show an open wooded landscape with cattle grazing by the pond. The pond is shown on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of Epsom and surroundings and must pre-date the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the late 1930s, Woodcote House and the surrounding land was sold to Earnest Harwood, whose building company developed most of the land for housing, forming The Woodcote Estate. Woodcote House itself was subdivided into flats and has undergone a major refurbishment.

In 1999, the Harwood family donated a large portion of the remaining woodland including the pond to be held in perpetuity by the Trustees of The Woodcote Millennium Green Trust. The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell officially opened The Woodcote Millennium Green in July 2000.

Whilst The Millennium Green was once a 7-acre site of overgrown brambles, it has been transformed by residents and volunteers into the attractive piece of managed natural woodland that it is today.

It was during one of my own walks through the woodland that I discovered a cast iron fire grate close to the rear of Woodcote House that had been unearthed by tree roots. Having obtained permission from one of the trustees of The Millennium Green to remove the fire grate, I contacted Bourne Hall Museum in Ewell and was later informed by one of the curator's contacts that the cast iron fire grate is likely to date to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and was probably used inside a room of Woodcote House prior to being replaced and buried in the ground at the back of the building.



Four times a year The Woodcote Millennium Green Trust holds maintenance days to help with the upkeep of the green which can be found at the rear of Epsom General Hospital.

It is a great community experience open to all ages and abilities so if you would like to get involved, or make a donation to fund maintenance and improvements, please email:

[info@woodcotemillenniumgreen.org.uk](mailto:info@woodcotemillenniumgreen.org.uk)

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## The Wisdom of Epsom

12 June 2024



**The Wizard of Oz** is this year's Epsom Playhouse Pantomime. Running Friday 15th December 2023 to Monday 1st January 2024. Book Tickets [HERE](#). And it is a good excuse to tell you about a past star of family entertainment who lived for many years in **Epsom**.

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One of Epsom's most famous and best loved former residents did not seek assistance from a wizard when seeking to overcome his difficulties, but chose instead to look for practical solutions and to work extremely hard to achieve his goals, thereby becoming an inspiration to us all.

The story of **Sir Norman Joseph Wisdom**, OBE who was an English actor, comedian, musician and singer will surely be made into a film in the future (he starred in 17 of his own) because despite his enormous successes, Sir Norman Wisdom was just as likely to be seen walking cheerfully down Epsom High Street acknowledging anyone who recognised him, as he was driving his Rolls Royce on his way to London for work.

From having had the privilege of meeting Sir Norman Wisdom in Epsom High Street on a few occasions and given him the thumbs up, I am embarrassed to have to admit that I was not fully aware of how big a star he was until researching material for this article, partly because of how humble he remained during the time he spent living in our town which he only left when his health began to fail him and his family became increasingly responsible for his care.

Sadly, the love and care the elderly Norman received from family members towards the Autumn of his life was quite unlike that which he had experienced when he was a young boy growing up.

Indeed, Norman Wisdom was only 14 years old when he arrived at Victoria Train Station in London, cold and alone and in need of somewhere safe to sleep, having been abandoned by his mother and rejected by his father who slapped the tearful Norman across the face and slammed the front door on him when telling him to go away because he was not wanted. Norman would never see his father again after this incident.

With only 2p in his pocket, Norman approached a hot drink stall at Victoria Train Station late one night and purchased a cup of tea from the vendor who took pity on the young Norman and kindly gave him a hot pie for free. A helpful conversation with the vendor followed and this led Norman to apply for a job with the British Army band even though Norman at the time could not read music or play any musical instruments.

It was permissible for Norman to apply to join the army band even though he was too young to join the army itself. Norman had planned to lie about having musical abilities, but not surprisingly it took very little time for the band master to establish the truth when Norman was unable to confirm the meanings of "flat" and "sharp".

By putting on what Norman in later life would describe as being the best act of his life, a tearful young Norman managed to convince the band master that his need for food and lodgings would make him a good recruit and indeed, by 1936 Norman Wisdom had become the fly weight boxing champion of the British Army in India, although the number of fights Norman took part in is unclear. By pretending to get punched by an invisible boxer whilst shadow boxing, Norman would make his friends laugh and his ability to do this with relative ease gave him great satisfaction.

During World War 2 Norman Wisdom transferred to The Royal Corp of Signals at Cheltenham and it was during this time that he participated in a charity show in Cheltenham, prompting the actor Rex Harrison to suggest that after the war Norman should consider pursuing a career in entertainment, which young Norman subsequently chose to do.



Norman Wisdom's big break came when he was asked to perform at The Victoria Palace in London where Laurel and Hardy and Vera Lynn topped the bill, not far from the place where Norman had once struggled to pay for a cup of tea as an unloved, cold and lonely 14-year-old boy who had failed to gain anyone's attention let alone a large audience's applause.

Norman Wisdom went on to become a massive celebrity and did not look back after acquiring his funny little suit and cap at a junk shop which became as famous as Charlie Chaplin's bowler hat and cane.

According to Sir Tim Rice, in the 1950s "a new Norman Wisdom film was like a new Beatles album coming out".

Norman was a "work horse" who continued to work extremely hard right up until the end of his life, but his busiest period ran from 1950 - 1968 with him becoming a huge hit on both sides of the Atlantic

The photographs with this article include images of a London Palladium pantomime programme dated 1960 which I purchased from the Princess Alice Hospice charity shop in Church Street in Epsom shortly after an elderly Norman had been moved out of his flat off of Church Street by family members for care purposes.

Norman enjoyed massive success in Albania where large crowds would gather to catch a glimpse of him and call out "Pitkin" after the name of his hapless character in a series of comedy films he starred in.

Norman Wisdom's list of achievements is far too long to include in this article and this article is sadly too short to document all of his remarkable charity work.

If Norman had any regrets before his passing at the age of 95 on 4 October 2010, they would probably include his failure to show a large, world-wide audience how good a straight actor he was, but Norman was a man who was grateful for the opportunities life had laid before him for seizing, to the extent that he always maintained he owed everything he had to the army where he learned how to read music and play musical instruments and get on in life after he had been rejected and abandoned by his parents at such a young age.

It was a great honour for me to have met the great man himself who returned to England from America where everyone loved him because he loved his children more than the considerable fame and fortune he was attracting there (only Peter Sellers could fill the comic void Norman left behind in America).

Sir Norman Wisdom, OBE will continue to make people laugh wherever his legendary films continue to be shown.

Whilst he was undoubtedly a comic genius, he was also a multi-talented all-round entertainer as well as a very nice man who only allowed his negative life experiences to shape his life and career in a positive way.

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## **Bonkers about bunkers in Epsom**

12 June 2024



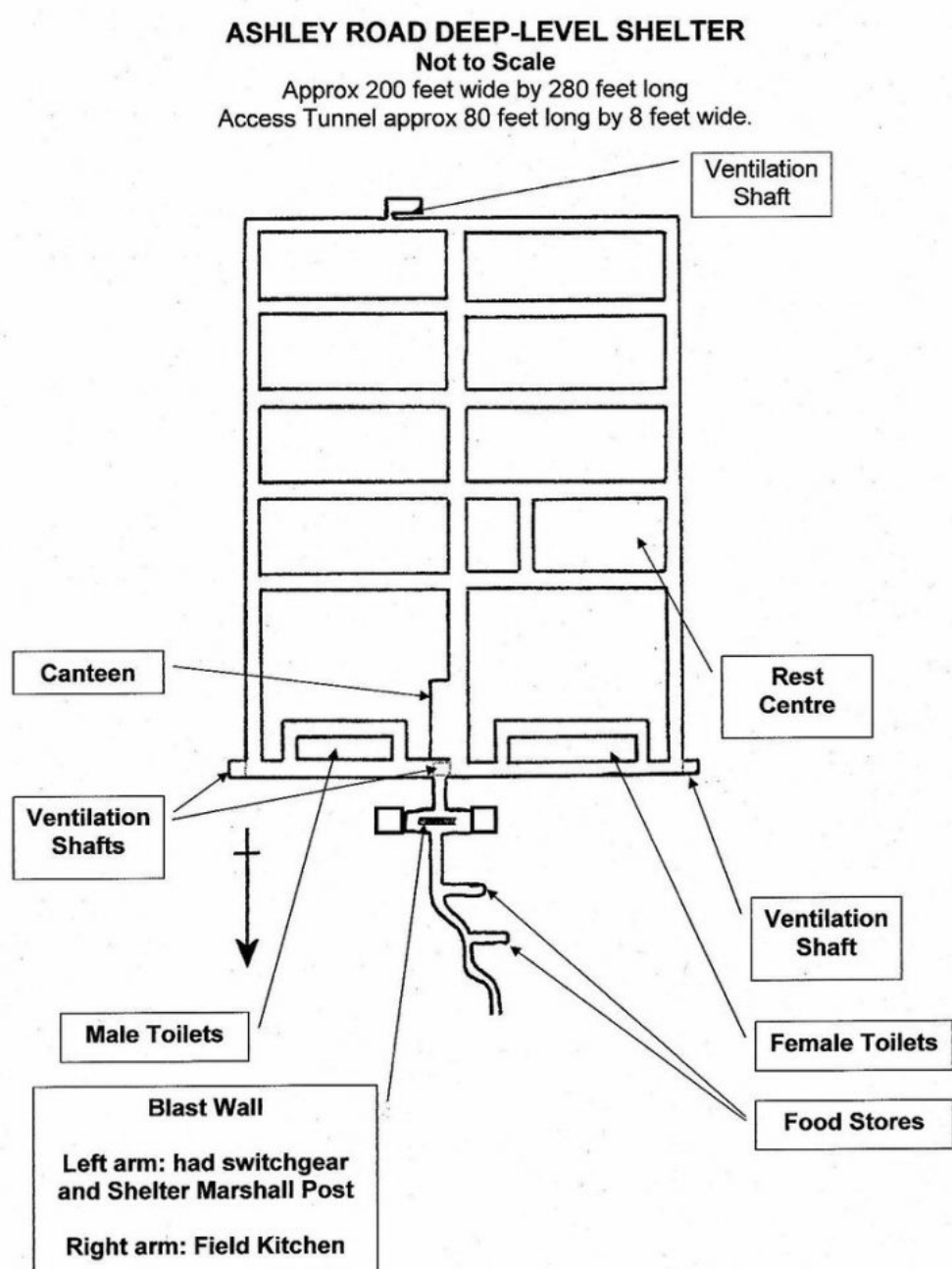
The Epsom and Ewell Times joined a group of bunker-busters to explore the little known World War 2 underground complex.

Located in 5 acres of private woodland on the west side of Ashley Road, Epsom can be found one of Epsom's largest, but least known historic buildings which needs to be preserved for the future due to its local and national importance.

The development was capable of accommodating 1500 people and included staff offices, a medical treatment area, a kitchen, toilet facilities and a small bathroom.

Although built at a cost of £1.3 million in today's money between 1941 and 1942, one visitor to the development left after 2 nights because he considered it to be "damp, chill and dismal" inside.

According to The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer, in 1942 people entering the development were advised to bring wraps or thick overcoats and lighting was by 12V bulkhead filament fittings served by metal conduited electric cables. The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer also states that 40 stand-by paraffin hurricane lamps along with fresh drinking water were supplied by the Epsom and Ewell Borough.



The Ashley Road Deep-level Shelter is an underground World War 2 air-raid shelter that has 17,000 square feet of tunnels ranging from 10-20 metres in depth (see plan kindly provided by Bourne Hall Museum) which sadly relatively few of the borough's residents know exists.

The spoil from the digging of the tunnels was piled up on top of them to increase the effectiveness of the shelter.

According to a report prepared in 1992 by Building Management South East, "The shelter is formed of a grid of tunnels bored and cut into the chalk and flint sub-strata and variously lined with brickwork and metalwork.

There are two main ventilation/access shafts, one at the north-east and another at the north-west corner of the shelter and a further shaft rises centrally from the north end”

“The entrance tunnel and all tunnel intersections are brick lined and the remaining tunnels are lined with either open mesh or galvanised corrugated iron sheeting, supported on various types of steel-sectioned portal frames.”

The speed with which the WW2 air-raid shelter was built and the documented costs associated with its construction have given rise to a lot of speculation about what may have existed on the site prior to any building work commencing and talk of a Northern Line tube tunnel extension, a place for the dead as well as an earlier air-raid shelter funded by Lady Sybil Grant the daughter of Lord Rosebery is not uncommon on the internet.

Mr Jeremy Harte, the curator at Bourne Hall Museum does not believe, however that there is any evidence to suggest the Ashley Road Deep-level Shelter has any mysterious origins and has written to me stating that the land in question was requisitioned by Surrey County Council for a deep air raid shelter on 8 February 1941 and the tunnels were dug in undisturbed native chalk in the same year.

Perhaps the speed with which the underground air raid shelter was constructed should not come as a surprise to anyone, after all our country was at war with Germany and the threat of bombing and a German invasion were very real.

Whilst the Ashley Road Deep-level Shelter was not completed until after the blitz, no one knew how the war would develop, so it is comforting to know the people of Epsom and Ewell were prepared and would have had somewhere to seek refuge if the threat posed by Hitler’s V1 and V2 rockets had escalated.

The Ashley Road Deep-level Shelter is now privately owned, but Hidden History Tours offer guided tours around the complex and can be contacted via their website.

The air-raid shelter serves as a lasting reminder of the devastating impact war has on communities.

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## Epsom’s Erotica By Candlelight

12 June 2024



A pale and slender man, suffering from ill health, began drawing an image by candlelight inside a room in Epsom’s Spread Eagle Hotel in June 1896 probably knowing he was nearing the end of his life.

A year earlier the same man’s career had taken a dramatic turn for the worse when he was sacked from his job through no fault of his own and now, he found himself alone, poverty stricken and shunned as a consequence of Oscar Wilde, the poet and playwright being arrested and charged with gross indecency.

With one lung barely functioning and the other becoming affected, (as determined by an Epsom doctor) the well-dressed dandy who liked to wear dove-grey suits, hats, ties and yellow gloves continued to create ink drawings inside his two rooms at The Spread Eagle Hotel in Epsom, albeit for a much-reduced client base.



Aubrey Beardsley

The frail man who had booked himself into The Spread Eagle Hotel was the artist, Aubrey Beardsley, but this was not his first visit to Epsom, as he had previously spent two of his difficult childhood years living in lodgings in Ashley Road, a short distance from where The University of the Creative Arts campus is today. Sadly, Aubrey had contracted tuberculosis as a young boy, but could take long walks on the Downs in the fresh air with his mother and sister, Mabel as recommended by his doctors.

Now, thirteen years later, Aubrey Beardsley had returned to Epsom on the advice of his doctors to breath the town's better air whilst walking on the Downs which he did for the duration of his visit, although such walks were becoming increasingly difficult to undertake.



*Illustration by Beardsley for Oscar Wilde's Salome*

Whilst Aubrey's second stay in Epsom only lasted a few weeks, he managed to complete eight illustrations in The Spread Eagle Hotel for a proposed privately printed edition of the ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes which could be sold expensively to connoisseurs by his publisher. The *Lysistrata* drawings are sexually explicit and these illustrations together with his drawings for Oscar Wilde's disturbing drama *Salome* (the play premiered in Paris in 1896) are among Aubrey's most famous.

According to Wikipedia, Aubrey Beardsley was "the most controversial artist of the Art Nouveau era" who was "renowned for his dark and perverse images and grotesque erotica, which were the main themes of his later work".

Wikipedia goes on to add that Aubrey "satirized Victorian values regarding sex, that at the time highly valued respectability", so it is not surprising that he chose to hide himself away in The Spread Eagle Hotel in the aftermath of the now outdated scandal involving Oscar Wilde and his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas which led to anyone associated with Oscar Wilde being suspected of sodomy.

Despite the sexual nature of his imagery, there is no evidence to suggest that Aubrey had sexual relations with anyone regardless of their sexual orientation, although the precise nature of his relationship with his sister, Mabel (who he drew naked in an illustration which also included his client Oscar Wilde and a goat-legged faun) will undoubtedly continue to form the topic of discussion amongst historians and art critics.

Upon departing Epsom where he had completed some of his best works, Aubrey Beardsley continued to suffer from

declining health leading to him having a violent haemorrhage in December 1896 and moving to the French Riviera in April 1897 in an attempt to prolong his life.

Sadly, Aubrey's days were numbered and it was whilst he was on his death bed in the French Riviera that Aubrey wrote to his publisher pleading with him to destroy the illustrations he had drawn in Epsom at The Spread Eagle Hotel. The publisher sent a telegraph to Aubrey telling him his dying wish had been granted, but the truth is the publisher lied and kept the illustrations for his own financial gain - an act that perhaps we should forgive him for selfishly carrying out.

Aubrey Beardsley died of tuberculosis in the early hours of 16 March 1898 in the presence of his mother and sister.

Aubrey may only have been 25 years old at the time of his death, but despite his young age, according to The Guardian Newspaper, "he put sexuality at the centre of modern art for the first time" and spread "his influence across Europe - to Vienna, Paris and Barcelona - 25 years before surrealism".

As the erotic ink drawings of the pale and slender young man which influenced world famous artists such as Picasso, Schiele and Klimt remain extremely important today, let us hope that in the near future a new plaque with the name "Aubrey Beardsley" prominently displayed on it will be attached to the front of The Spread Eagle (the existing plaque makes no mention of Aubrey) to remind everyone of the talented artist who came to Epsom to draw some of his most thought provoking and imaginative illustrations long before there was any acceptance of fluid sexualities and total freedom of expression.

The Spread Eagle in Epsom High Street is perhaps more significant than many people realise as a result of Aubrey Beardsley staying there and drawing erotica by candlelight.

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## Healthy future for Epsom's restored White House

12 June 2024



The **White House**, located at 16 Waterloo Road, **Epsom**, nestled between Blacks Burgers and Nandos, is a Grade II listed building that dates back to the early 1700s. Recently, it has undergone a beautiful restoration in preparation for an exciting new phase in its rich history.



The new owner has successfully preserved the building's charm and character, while modernizing its internal features to create comfortable and contemporary treatment and therapy spaces. The White House is transformed into a Health and Wellness Centre, where professionals with various skills can utilize rooms once occupied by two historically significant individuals, as confirmed by the plaque on the building's front, visible from the pathway.

Around 1800, Prince George and Mrs. Fitzherbert resided in the same building now known as The White House. However, the question arises: What became of Princess Caroline, the woman Prince George married just five years earlier, and why is her name absent from the plaque?

While King George III led a scandal-free life, the same cannot be said for his son, Prince George, who lived an extravagant lifestyle characterized by heavy drinking and entertaining mistresses. Burdened by mounting debts, Prince George sought financial assistance from his father, who agreed to help him under the condition that Prince George marry his cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick.



Although Prince George had previously secretly married the twice-widowed Maria Anne Fitzherbert, this marriage was invalid because King George III had not consented to it. On April 8, 1795, Prince George married Princess Caroline at the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace. However, the couple proved incompatible despite Caroline giving birth to Princess Charlotte, George's only legitimate child, just nine months after their wedding ceremony.

Upon their first meeting, Prince George called for a glass of brandy, while Princess Caroline commented on how much thinner and more handsome George appeared in the portrait she had seen of him. Prince George found his wife unattractive and "unhygienic" and could not bear to have intimate relations with her (he ensured he was drunk on the night of their wedding). Princess Caroline, on the other hand, was beloved by the public, who generally despised her husband, "the Prince of Pleasure," due to his continuous overindulgence and accumulating debts.

On January 29, 1820, George ascended to the throne as King of the United Kingdom and Hanover, with Caroline becoming Queen Consort in name. George sought a divorce from Caroline but couldn't obtain one due to the weak evidence against her. This was partly because Caroline was held in high regard by the public, who viewed George's conduct as immoral.

Caroline was barred from attending King George IV's coronation on July 19, 1821, and subsequently fell ill in London. Tragically, she passed away three weeks after the coronation she had not been allowed to attend. Her funeral procession moved slowly through London en route to Brunswick, where she was laid to rest. This allowed George to continue his romantic attachment to Maria Fitzherbert and entertain other mistresses.



The brass medallion, which I purchased a few years ago at **Oxfam in Epsom High Street**, likely belonged to one of Queen Caroline's supporters before her death. It resembles a miniature portrait, much like the one of Prince George shown above. "Caroline Queen of England" is inscribed around the perimeter of the medallion, featuring a bust of King George IV's lawful wife.

The brass medallion serves as a poignant reminder of how poorly Queen Caroline was treated by her husband, King George IV, and underscores the ongoing need to ensure that women from all cultures and walks of life are shown respect and treated fairly in today's modern society.

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## Another King "Charles the III's" Epsom affair

12 June 2024



**Bramshott House** in Epsom's Market Place is a late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Grade II listed building that was built to provide accommodation for the rich and famous of the period who wanted to visit Epsom and its well to sample its famous waters.

Now better known as the premises of Caffè Nero, Bramshott House displays a plaque reminding coffee lovers that a very special royal visitor used to be invited back to the building by a woman for a coffee as long ago as 1670.

The woman in question had a lively personality that attracted many men, the most notable being a King.

Called "pretty, witty Nell" by **Samuel Pepys** who praised her performances as one of the first actresses on the English stage, Eleanor ("Nell") Gwynne rose from humble beginnings to become best known for being the favourite mistress of King Charles II, with whom she would go on to have two sons.

Having previously been the mistress of Charles Hart and Charles Sackville, Nell jokingly called the King "**her Charles the Third**".







The love affair between **King Charles II** and **Nell Gwynne** began in April 1668 when Nell was attending a performance at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields and caught the attention of the King who preferred to flirt with Nell than watch the play (King Charles II never made any attempt to keep the affair a secret).

**Samuel Pepys** knew **Epsom** well and confirmed in his diary entry for 14 July 1667 that Nell Gwynne was in residence at what we now call Bramshott House where she helped "keep a merry house". Nell lived in two little bay-windowed rooms overlooking the street, one of which was used as a bedroom and the other as a sitting room.

When Nell Gwynne entertained King Charles II, the King's court would stay in **Epsom's Assembly Rooms** (now occupied by **Wetherspoons**).

King Charles II died on 6 February 1685, but whilst on his deathbed made known his deep affection for "pretty, witty Nell" when instructing his brother, James II, "let not poor Nelly starve".

Sadly, the two bay windows that Nell Gwynne used to look out of and the balcony she used to sit on, no longer form part of Bramshott House, but the plaques on the building and the King Charles II cast iron fire-back that that I purchased from **The Princess Alice Hospice** charity shop in **Church Street** in Epsom a few years ago help to remind us of a rags to royalty true-life story not unlike that of Cinderella that was acted out opposite the site of today's Epsom's Clock Tower by one of England's earliest female actors.

Next time you order a coffee at **Caffe Nero** spare a thought for "pretty, witty Nell" who won the heart of a King, if not

that of some unforgiving past historians.



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## Urning a big profit on rare Epsom find

12 June 2024



A young Epsom couple will be making a large donation to charity after the miniature vase they purchased in an **Epsom**

charity shop for £2.50 sold this weekend at auction for £6300.

The beautiful black Japanese cloisonne 4-inch-high vase by Namikawa Yasuyuki, featuring a cockerel, hen and chicks was created during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The same technique was used to create the taller red vase shown, which I purchased from the Debra charity shop in Ewell Village a few years ago.

Whilst charity shops, like Debra in Ewell and the one in Epsom the young couple visited, are always on the lookout for Asian treasures, due to the profitable Chinese and Japanese antique markets, work of the quality of Yasuyuki rarely finds its way onto the bric-a-brac shelves of charity shops; so it is not difficult to understand how the fine detailed cloisonne work was overlooked and perhaps mistaken for a transfer print. Note how different the red Debra charity shop Japanese cloisonne vase looks to the young Epsom couple's find.



Cloisonne is the technique of creating designs on metal vessels with coloured glass paste which is placed within enclosures made of copper or bronze wires attached to the vessel. Then the vessel is fired in a kiln at a temperature of about 800C.

Although there were markings on the base of the black cloisonne vase, it would have taken an expert to understand the significance of these, which is why the young Epsom couple contacted Canterbury Auction Galleries who succeeded in selling the much sought after vase today. The auction house had sold a larger vase by Yasuyuki for £29,000 in April 2019.

The Epsom couple that found the Yasuyuki cloisonne vase have generously pledged to make a large donation to the Epsom charity shop they purchased the vase from.

The finders intend to treat themselves to a well-deserved holiday with the remaining sale proceeds.

DEBRA was established in 1978 by Phyllis Hilton, whose daughter Debra had epidermolysis bullosa (EB), as the world's first patient support group for people living with EB. Epidermolysis bullosa is the name for a group of painful genetic skin conditions that cause the skin to become very fragile and tear or blister at the slightest touch.

The local branch can be found at 78 High St, Ewell, Epsom KT17 1RE



Top photo background image: cc. Remi Mathis (auction illustration, not the real one).

## Daughter of Lord Rosebery who helped Derby Gypsies

12 June 2024



Born on 18 September 1879, **Lady Sybil Myra Caroline Grant** (nee Primrose) was the daughter of **Lord Rosebery**, the Epsom resident and Liberal Prime Minister from 1894 to 1895 and Hannah de Rothschild.

Lady Sybil married a regular soldier, Sir Charles John Cecil Grant of the Grant's whisky family on 28 March 1903, at **Christ Church, Epsom Common** where the Rosebery family worshipped.

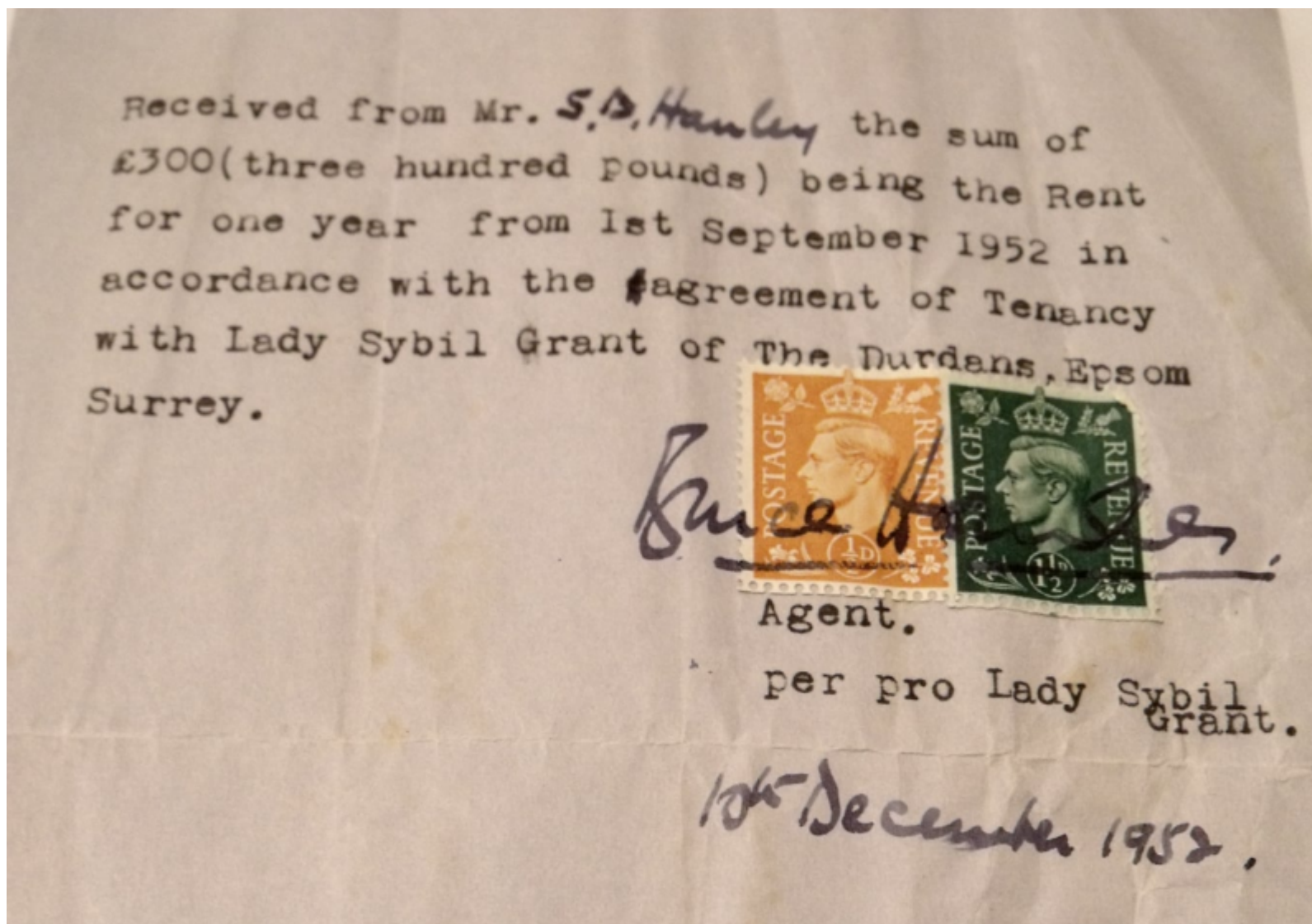
She was a successful writer, ceramic designer, artist and breeder of horses and rare dogs who inherited **The Durdans** in Chalk Lane, Epsom upon the death of her father in 1929 and made it her home.

During the First World War, she contributed to the Princess Mary's Gift Book which was a book of collected illustrated stories written by leading authors of the time such as J M Barrie, A Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling. The book was sold to help raise money for the war effort.



After WW1 Lady Grant raised money for disabled servicemen through a series of activities which included organising a fete each year at The Durdans. There her pottery (and that crafted by disabled soldiers) was sold for the disabled soldiers' benefit.

The banding wheel used to decorate ceramics shown in the photo dates to circa 1950 and came from Jo's Household Clearances in Ewell with a receipt signed on behalf of Lady Sybil Grant for land rented out to an Epsom racehorse trainer.



Lady Sybil Grant was a passionate campaigner and sought to champion the underdog. In 1937, a new set of by-laws were (presumably) promulgated by the newly chartered Epsom Council. (The Epsom and Walton Downs Conservators was created in 1984.) The regulations prohibited gypsy caravans from being sited on Epsom Downs. Lady Grant then provided gypsies with a field on her own land where they were legally permitted to stay for Derby week.

In June 1938 the Epsom gypsies decorated Lady Grant's grandstand box with 700 artificial flowers to show their gratitude, an act that highlighted the close bond of friendship that had developed between the parties. Sybil in later life spent much of her time in a caravan as she grew increasingly eccentric prior to her death on 25 February 1955.

My research suggests that the banding wheel once belonged to the multi-talented Lady Sybil Grant who spent a full and active life devoted to helping others less fortunate than herself.

After her death, among other things, a collection of maps of Epsom were lodged with the National Library of Scotland; no doubt on account of the family's various ties of an hereditary, electoral and property nature to Scotland

Perhaps Lady Sybil Grant deserves greater recognition than she currently receives.

## Royal Patronage of Epsom College to continue?

12 June 2024



Epsom College has been honoured to receive unbroken royal patronage from a reigning monarch since 1855 when Queen Victoria became the College's first Patron and upon its opening by HRH Prince Albert.

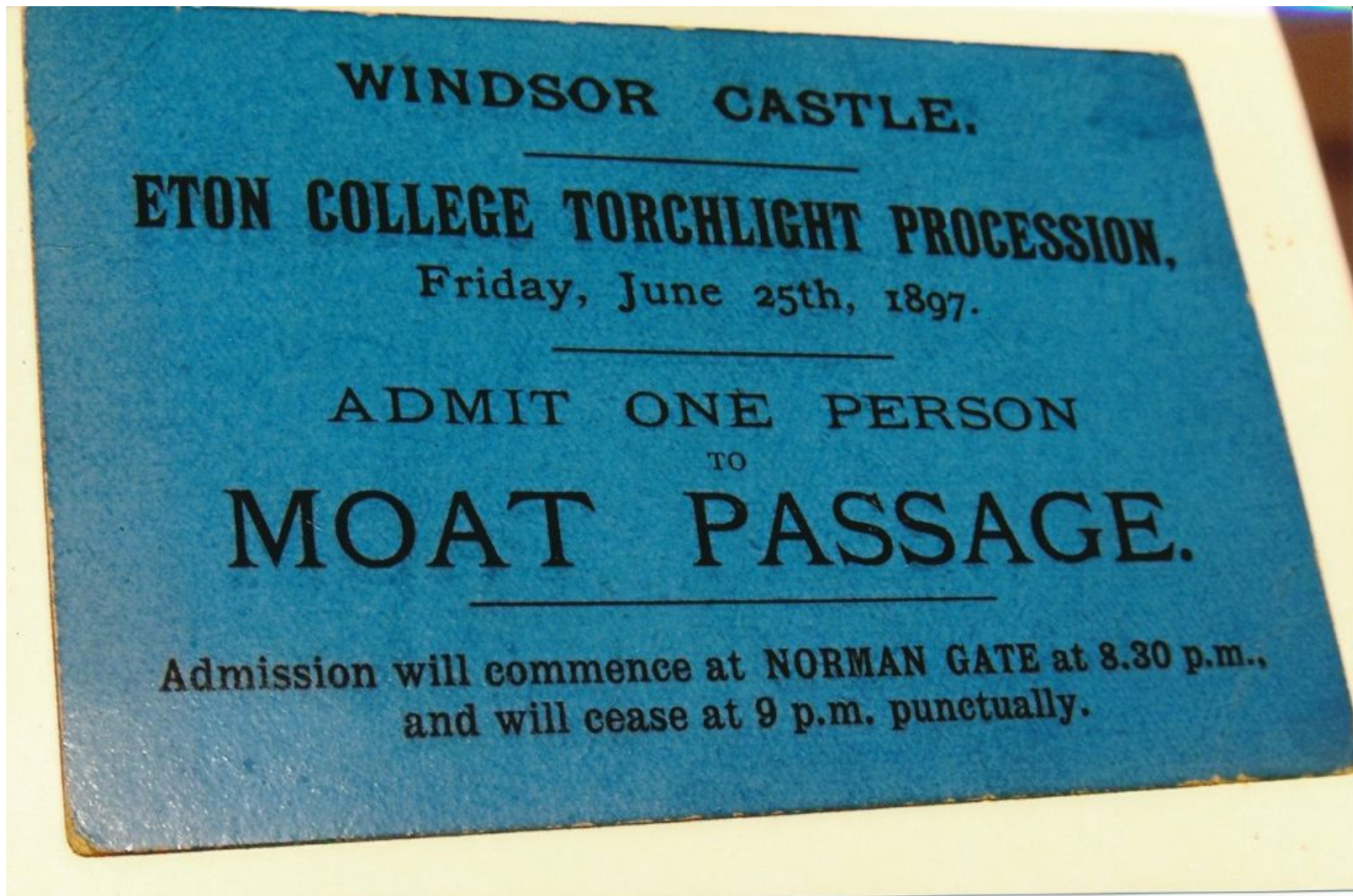
Whilst the College's royal patronage is unbroken, with the recent passing of Queen Elizabeth II and after Saturday's Coronation it is hoped King Charles III will become Patron of Epsom College sometime in the future.

Queen Victoria never actually visited Epsom College. However, she did attend the Epsom Derby in 1840, having first attended it with her mother, as a twelve year old child in 1831.

Queen Victoria watched "Little Wonder", a 50-1 outsider win the 1840 Epsom Derby and Her Majesty went on to present the jockey, the youngest and smallest in the race, with a gold whip for his victory.

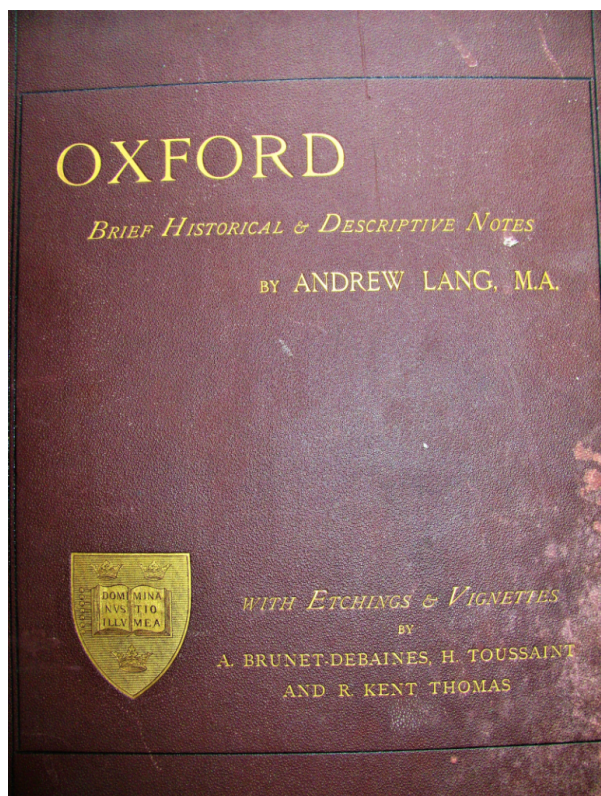
Queen Victoria had been expected to return to Epsom to attend further Derbys, but sadly after 1840 she never visited Epsom again. Perhaps because of the difficulties she had experienced getting to the race track due to crowds blocking her

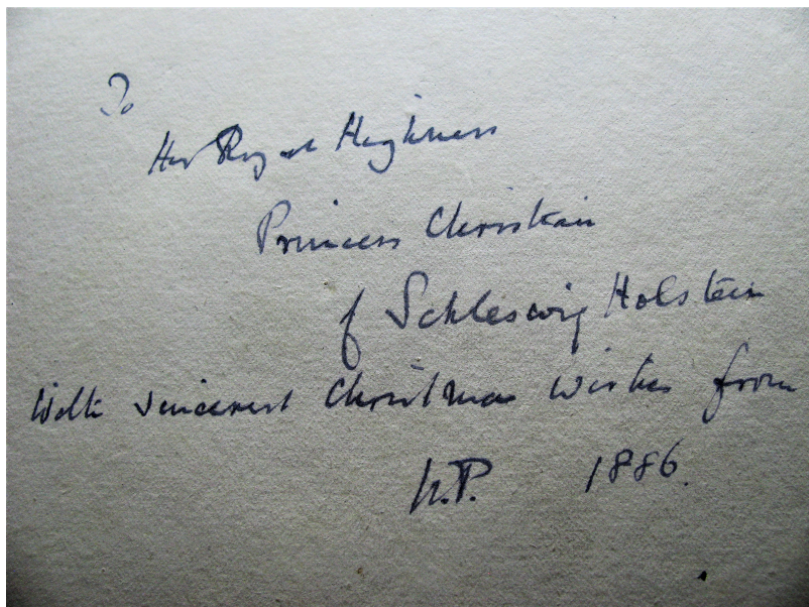
route. This led to the construction of Tattenham Corner Train Station, that was completed after her death in 1901 and was used by succeeding British monarchs.



The entrance ticket to The Eton College Torchlight Procession at Windsor Castle, which took place in Queen Victoria's presence during her Diamond Jubilee, was found inside a book purchased from Jo's Household Clearances in Ewell.

An interesting book about Oxford that was given to Queen Victoria's third daughter Helena, after she became Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, came from the same establishment a few years ago.





The book about Oxford, which bears the inscription date of 1886, was given to the Princess as a Christmas present. The timing of the gift would have coincided with her eldest son, Prince Christian Victor of Schleswig-Holstein, commencing his Oxford University education at Magdalen College.

If anyone knows whose initials are at the bottom of the inscription, or whether Queen Victoria's third daughter Helena had any links with Epsom that caused her book to be discovered in Ewell, please let me know by contacting The Epsom and Ewell Times.

## Surrey Police's nose for dog training

12 June 2024



**Surrey Police** led the way in Police Dog development by offering a Metropolitan Police Officer, DC **Harry Darbyshire**, a transfer to the Surrey Constabulary in October 1947, where he was made a Sergeant and put in charge of the Force's new Police Dog Section.

Top image is Sgt Darbyshire with Anna of Avondale's son Loki

Whilst dogs had been used by British Police Forces in various limited capacities prior to the Second World War, it was not until after the war that Britain's Police Forces began to consider the possibility of using working dogs to undertake major Police work on a daily basis.

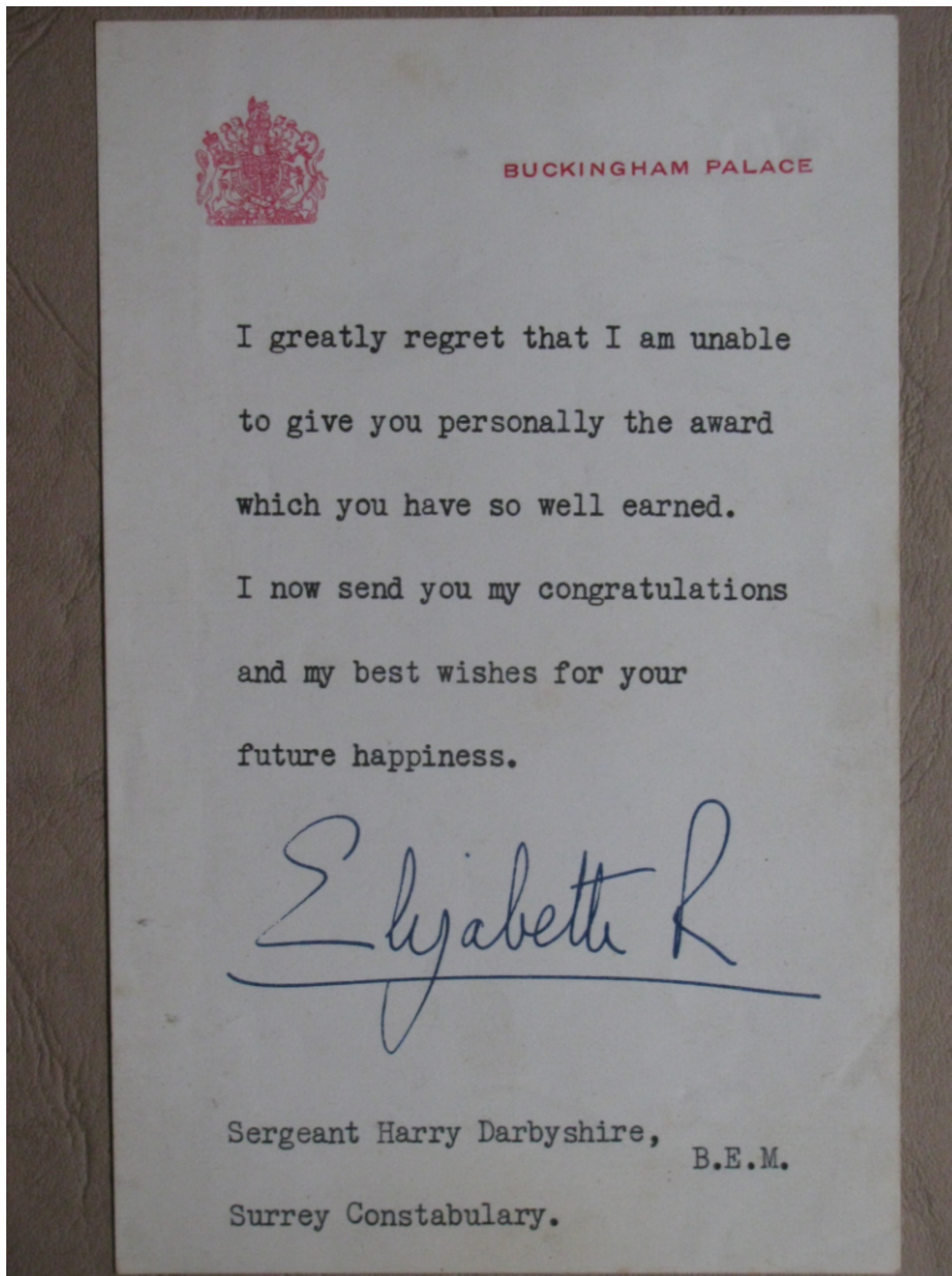
Sergeant Darbyshire was experienced in breeding dogs and training them according to the German method. This was the method Surrey Police had researched and decided to proceed with.

Sergeant Darbyshire owned a German Shepherd dog called "**Anna of Avondale**" that had previously belonged to a German soldier, who had served during the war. Anna of Avondale was Surrey Police's first operational dog and together with her son, **Loki**, formed the Surrey Police Dog Section that would go on to lead the way in Police dog development in Britain and abroad.

Surrey Police dogs that performed well would be included in the breeding programme, with under achieving dogs being removed from the Police Dog Section altogether.

Sir **Joseph Simpson**, the Chief Constable, who had recruited Sergeant Darbyshire was a member of the Kennel Club and his interest in working dogs led to him sanctioning the expansion of the Police Dog Section and encouraging Surrey Police's dog handlers to enter civilian Working Trials. This led to the Surrey Police's Dog Section obtaining even greater recognition due to the high number of awards it won.

The Secretary of the Associated Sheep, Police and Army Dog Society (**ASPADS**) (also known as the Working Trials Society) has stated that, "Harry Darbyshire did more than any other person to put ASPADS, Working Trials and the Nation's Police Dog Sections on the map". Darbyshire was credited with training over 200 dogs in his 29 years police service. He was consulted from around the world, including Kenya and New Zealand.



I was delighted to discover that the photo album containing images of German Shepherd dogs that I had won on an online auction site, once belonged to Sgt. Darbyshire.

Surrey Police's first Police Dog, Anna of Avondale died in August 1950, but her name lives on in The Anna of Avondale Trophy, which serving Police Dogs and their handlers compete for every year in her memory.

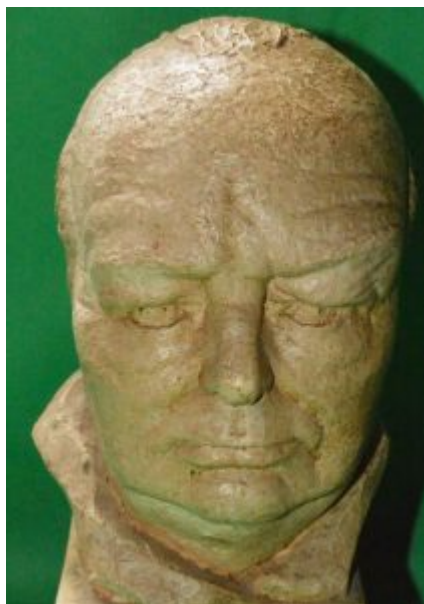
The images accompanying this article were taken from the photo album and show Sergeant Darbyshire, who was awarded the BEM (British Empire Medal), with some of his working dogs.

Sgt Darbyshire's award of the BEM signed by the Monarch of the day.

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## Churchill's visits to Epsom

12 June 2024



In 1903 Winston Churchill, then the MP for Oldham, visited Epsom College and unveiled a memorial stained glass window in memory of the Old Epsomians who had died in the Boer War. The memorial stained glass window was commissioned and paid for by Old Epsomians and designed by Francis Oldaker. Oldaker was an Old Epsomian and stained glass artist, he lived locally and is buried in Epsom's Ashley Road cemetery.



Unveiled by Winston Churchill. Image courtesy Epsom College

Winston Churchill was a fan of horse raising and attended the Epsom Derby on 4 June 1949 with his wife Clementine. He became Sir Winston in 1953.

I'm hoping that readers will be able throw light on a plaster bust of Churchill created by Churchill's only female cousin, Clare Sheridan in 1943.

Clare Sheridan was a "colourful" character who established herself as a successful sculptor of portrait busts; her sitters included her then lover, the actor Charlie Chaplin together with H G Wells, Lord Asquith, Trotsky and Lenin. Her involvement with prominent Russians led to her being placed under surveillance by British intelligence much to the embarrassment of Churchill and his political colleagues who urged him to stay away from her.

Sheridan's bronze busts of her first cousin Churchill were created during World War 2, but only after Sheridan threatened to commit suicide outside 10 Downing Street if Churchill failed to allow her to sculpt him. Examples of her bronze busts of Sir Winston Churchill can be found at Churchill's former home, Chartwell as well as at Blenheim Palace, Harrow School

and Hastings Town Hall, but the whereabouts of a smaller bust created by Clare Sheridan especially for Churchill's wife, Clementine is not known.

References to Clare Sheridan's bronze busts of Sir Winston Churchill can be found in quite a few of Churchill's WW2 letters, but having studied all the relevant letters in great detail, I have not been able to find out anything about the smaller plaster bust which I purchased at a London estate sale.

Could it be that the 9-inch-high plaster bust of Sir Winston Churchill that I acquired at an estate sale is the small bust of Sir Winston Churchill that wartime letters confirm was given to Churchill's wife, Clementine by Clare Sheridan?

Please contact The Epsom and Ewell Times if you have any information about Clare Sheridan's small plaster bust of Sir Winston Churchill.