

Surrey Open Studios Returns - Discover Artists Near Epsom

28 April 2026



Art lovers in Epsom and Ewell are being invited to step inside artists' working spaces this summer as the annual Surrey Artists Open Studios returns from 6th to 21st June 2026. The county-wide event sees hundreds of artists open their doors to the public, offering a chance to meet creators, view works in progress and buy original art directly.

Studios are organised into geographic areas across Surrey, with those closest to Epsom and Ewell forming part of the East Surrey grouping, alongside nearby towns such as Reigate and Redhill. Visitors are encouraged to plan their visits in advance, with many artists opening on selected days throughout the two-week period.

Among the participating studios within easy reach of Epsom is AJ Studio Gallery, where visitors can view a large collection of oil paintings. Also in Epsom, Terry O'Brien and Jacky Cowdrey Studio will be welcoming guests to explore their work in an informal studio setting.

A little further afield in Redhill, Heart and Home Studios brings together a range of disciplines including sculpture, handmade books and jewellery, while other studios across East Surrey showcase everything from ceramics and textiles to contemporary painting and mixed media.

The appeal of the Open Studios format lies in its accessibility. Visitors can explore a wide variety of creative spaces—from garden workshops to established studios—and speak directly with artists about their techniques and inspiration. Many venues also offer smaller works, prints and cards, making the event an opportunity to purchase unique pieces at a range of prices.

Full details of all participating artists, including opening days, times and exact locations, are set out in the official Surrey Artists Open Studios programme, available here:

<https://surreyopenstudios.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/SAOS-2025-Programme-PAG.pdf>

With dozens of studios within a short drive of Epsom and Ewell, the event offers a simple way to explore Surrey's vibrant arts scene and support local artists this June.

Lionel Blackman

Living Rivers Exhibition Opens in Epsom

28 April 2026



"Our rivers bring the community together and inspire people to protect them," organisers said as the *Living Rivers Exhibition* officially opened at the Ebbisham Centre this week.

The community-led exhibition, organised by Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network (eeCAN), welcomed residents, partners and supporters to its launch on 22 April. The event was led by eeCAN Chair William Ward and formally opened by the Mayor and Mayoress of Epsom and Ewell, Robert and Marilyn Leach.

Visitors also heard from several contributors, including Peter, Chair of Epsom Camera Club, local artist David Ede, a Hogsmill River citizen scientist, and representatives from Emma's Bubble Trust.

The exhibition brings together artwork from local schools, colleges, art groups and individual artists, offering a wide range of interpretations of rivers and their importance to the environment and community life.

Inspired by Robert Macfarlane's *Is A River Alive?*, the collection highlights both the beauty of local waterways and the environmental challenges they face, including pollution and neglect. Organisers say the aim is to raise awareness while celebrating creativity across all age groups.

A spokesperson for eeCAN praised the contributions from across the community. “The artwork brings our rivers to life and encourages people to think about how we protect them,” they said.

The exhibition is located on the first floor of the Ebbisham Centre, just outside the library in Derby Square. Entry is free, and visitors can also take part in family-friendly activities, with refreshments available on site.

Running until 22 May 2026, the *Living Rivers Exhibition* invites residents to explore, reflect and engage with the future of local waterways.

Epsom and Ewell Climate Action Network has also announced a Heritage Walk along the Hogsmill River, taking place on Thursday 30 April at 1:30 p.m.

A limited number of places are still available. Those interested can reserve a place by emailing: eeclimateactionnetwork@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61573916432364>

Webpage: <https://www.eecan.org/home>

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Kirby Fans Pack the Kerb in Epsom

28 April 2026



Children’s author Katie Kirby drew crowds to Waterstones Epsom today Friday 10th, as families queued more than 100 metres along the High Street for a book signing on the final day of the Easter school holidays.

In bright spring sunshine, parents and excited children waited patiently for their chance to meet the bestselling writer, whose hugely popular *Lottie Brooks* series has become a staple for young readers across the UK. Staff at the store reported a steady flow throughout the day, with the queue stretching well beyond the shop frontage at its peak.

Kirby, a former primary school teacher turned full-time author and illustrator, has built a devoted following with her humorous and relatable books aimed at middle-grade readers. Her breakout success, *The Extremely Embarrassing Life of Lottie Brooks*, was shortlisted for major children’s book awards and has sold in significant numbers, with subsequent titles cementing her reputation as one of the UK’s leading voices in children’s fiction.



Epsom school student Ellie with her mother and the author



Epsom school student Rosie Gordon with the author

Her stories, told in diary format, capture the awkwardness and comedy of growing up, striking a chord particularly with readers aged 8 to 12. The blend of cartoon-style illustrations and accessible writing has helped drive strong sales both in bookshops and through school reading programmes.

Today's event reflected that popularity. Children clutching copies of Kirby's books chatted animatedly in the queue, while parents described the visit as a highlight of the holidays. Inside, Kirby signed books and spoke briefly with readers, creating what one attendee described as "a really special moment" for young fans.

Booksellers say such events have become increasingly important in encouraging children to read for pleasure. The turnout in Epsom suggests that, despite digital distractions, the appeal of meeting a favourite author—and taking home a

signed copy—remains as strong as ever.

Lionel Blackman

Epsom Chamber Choir spring bridge across the centuries

28 April 2026



What a glorious evening of music there was to be enjoyed last Saturday night (21st March) in St Martin's Church, Epsom, with the Epsom Chamber Choir accompanied by Affinity Chamber Orchestra. There were two apparently diverse works for the concert, one in each half, having no obvious connection to each other and yet surprisingly intertwined. The conductor was the fine musician Jack Apperley.

A Time to Dance by Alec Roth, performed after the interval, was composed with the idea of being heard alongside the work which opened the concert, Bach's Magnificat. Alec Roth had thought to use very similar instrumental sections as Bach intended when composing the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise to God on learning that she will bear the Messiah. Affinity Chamber Orchestra were therefore the perfect accompaniment to the Chamber Choir for both works, although A Time to Dance added some unusual percussion instead of the timpani for Bach's Magnificat.

The programme notes were very thorough and helpful, reminding the listener of the rich history of Bach's Magnificat and providing background to the composition of the modern work, A Time to Dance. The Choir and Orchestra gave an incredibly uplifting rendering of Bach's Magnificat, a joy to hear with its choral drama and fine arias.

Throughout the concert, the sound was consistently glorious, with impressively clear enunciation from the Choir and very sensitive accompaniment by the Orchestra. The acoustics of St Martin's Church were ideally suited to the extensive dynamic range of both singers and instrumentalists, as well as to the style of both the Magnificat and the modern Roth composition.

The whole concert showcased the exceptional talents of the Chamber Choir singers, as members took all the solos throughout. This followed Bach's original intention when composing the Magnificat and was mirrored beautifully in the storytelling of A Time to Dance. This modern composition proved a tuneful delight, taking the listener through movements depicting Time, the Seasons, times of day, Love and Dance. These themes were inspired by biblical text from Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, alongside both modern and historic poetry used as settings for the various movements.

The audience was treated to an ever-changing variety of words and music for Sunrise, a Spring Morning, Summer Noon, Autumn Evening and Winter Night. After the delights of Spring, with soloists and Choir beginning a journey of joyful reawakening and the encouragement to dance, Summer Noon conveyed a sense of drowsy heat and gently swaying countryside, including text from William Blake's *The Fly*. The Choir and soloists vividly captured the atmosphere of high summer.

In "Humdrum" during Part III, Autumn Evening, the Choir revelled in the fun of song and dance, escaping the daily routine of life. This movement was brought to life by percussive elements including washboard, dinner gong and desk bell. Moving into Winter Night, more delicate musical textures emerged before "A Glee for Winter" burst forth, bringing merriment and evoking love and laughter, with dance once again at its heart.

The final movement, Afterdance: Proper Exercise, saw the Choir put down their scores to sing and clap with visible joy and enthusiasm. The whole work was magnificently performed by both Orchestra and Choir, expressing a vivid sense of dance throughout.

This was an exceptional concert of the highest quality and clearly much appreciated by the audience.

Future concert dates for Epsom Chamber Choir are 27 June, 7 November and 12 December at St Martin's Church, Epsom.

Elizabeth Hargrave

Photo credit: Paul McCan

Epsom's UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

28 April 2026



A new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) from Nigeria, marking a strengthening collaboration between the UK and Nigeria's vibrant creative and cultural industries.

The signing of the agreement was the key event in a visit of UCA's Surrey campuses in Farnham and Epsom by a Nigerian delegation, which was part of the Nigerian President's week-long state visit to the Royal family in the UK.

Signing the agreement was the Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hannatu Musa Musawa; the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Obi Asika; and UCA's Joint Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark Ellul.

Prof. Ellul remarked: "We're delighted to sign this agreement and strengthen our deepening relationship with Nigeria's creative and cultural industries.

"We're pleased to be able to join the rallying call for an institutional commitment that aligns our expertise in creative higher education with Nigeria's ambition to build lasting relationships that positions its creative economy as a central pillar to their economic diversification and youth empowerment."

The Honourable Minister, Hannatu Musa Musawa commented: "Nigeria is proud to formalise its partnership with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), marking a significant milestone in advancing the nation's creative industry and creative economy.

"This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, talent development, and institutional exchange, building on sustained engagement with key stakeholders including the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigeria Governors Forum.

"The agreement underscores a forward-looking vision to strengthen bilateral ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, driving long-term growth and global competitiveness across the creative sector."

Joining the Minister and Director General were multiple creative leaders from Nigeria and the UK including the British Council, the UK Department for Business and Trade, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Nigerian Film Corporation, DG of National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Nigeria, Senior Special Advisers to the Minister, VC and Pro Vice from University of Abuja.

The delegation received a tour of UCA's industry-grade facilities in traditional and emerging arts at its School of Creative & Cultural Industries in Farnham and School of Creative Business, Fashion & Enterprise in Epsom. They also engaged in a panel discussion about UK-Nigerian Creative and Cultural Collaboration.

Director General, Obi Asika, added: "National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) is delighted to have convened the Honourable Minister Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy of Nigeria (FMACTCE), and UCA in the UK, to advance a bold global knowledge and curriculum partnership designed to unlock the full potential of Nigeria's creative industry and creative economy.

"Strengthened by our ongoing collaboration with the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) established in 2025 and aligned with the UK-Nigeria co-working group under Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), where I serve as Co-Chair for Nigeria with Hon Florence Eshalomi, Mp, as Co-Chair for the UK, this milestone moment brings together influential leaders across the public and private sectors to drive innovation, talent development, and sustainable growth across the creative ecosystem."

Many talented creatives from Nigeria are already studying at UCA, across disciplines such as film, fashion, design, animation, and digital media, and making a lasting impact across UCA's three campuses - bringing fresh perspectives, cultural richness, and creative excellence that continue to enrich the university's global community.

By recognising Nigeria's ambition to promote its nation's cultural and creative industries, UCA will utilise its expertise to further help it grow and sustain the next generation of creative talent and cultural leaders globally.

University for the Creative Arts



Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom



Epsom & Ewell Silver Band Delivers Strong Performance at 2026 Regional Championships

28 April 2026



STEVENAGE, March 21, 2026 — The Epsom & Ewell Silver Band took to the stage today at the Gordon Craig Theatre for the London & Southern Counties Regional Brass Band Championships, competing in the highly competitive First Section.

Under the expert baton of Musical Director Tariq Ahmed, the band delivered a polished performance of this year's set work, *Variations on Was Lebet* by Andrew Wainwright.

2026 First Section Results

The adjudicators, David Hirst and Steven Mead, faced a difficult task in a field of 14 high-quality bands. While Fulham Brass and the East of England Co-op Band secured the top two spots to qualify for the National Finals, Epsom & Ewell earned a respectable placing, further cementing their status in the section.

Looking Ahead

The result marks another year of solid progress for the band. Speaking after the results, members expressed pride in the performance, noting the significant step up in technical demands this year.

Fans won't have to wait long to hear the band again; they are already preparing for their popular Summer Concert in the Walled Garden, scheduled for July 12th at the Old Moat Garden Centre.

Epsom & Ewell Silver Band website - www.eesb.org.uk

Steven McCormick

Photo credit - the author

An evening song preludes a Mass and a Requiem by Epsom Choral Society

28 April 2026



This concert at St Martin's Church, Epsom, was another milestone in the life of one of the town's cultural jewels, its Choral Society. The German Requiem by Johannes Brahms was coupled with two pieces by his contemporary and friend Josef Rheinberger - *Abendlied* and the *Mass in E Flat* - providing an effective and well-matched prelude to the main work.

Rheinberger's *Abendlied*, composed when he was just fifteen (and later revised), brought a warm six-part choral texture well suited to the spacious acoustic of St Martin's. The performance was well controlled, with clear communication between choir and conductor. His *Mass for Double Choir* (1878), rooted in Renaissance tradition but shaped by Romantic language, offered greater contrasts of dynamics and texture. These were generally well realised, though from some positions the antiphonal effect of the two choirs was less distinct. The *Gloria* made a strong impact with tight ensemble in the louder passages, while the restrained drama of the *et sepultus est* in the *Credo* was sensitively handled. The confident entries of the *Sanctus* contrasted effectively with the quieter close of the *Benedictus*, and the atmospheric *Agnus Dei* provided a fitting conclusion to a thoughtful performance of this substantial work.

Brahms's *German Requiem* is not a liturgical setting but a deeply personal reflection on remembrance. Taking years to complete, it stands as a work of remarkable craftsmanship and cohesion. Here it was performed using Iain Farrington's

seven-part accompaniment for three strings, three wind and piano. This arrangement proved effective, avoiding the balance challenges of a full orchestra, though at times the upper strings felt slightly underpowered.

The choir was central to the performance and rose impressively to the challenge. From the opening movement, there was a strong sense of confidence, contrast and atmosphere. The ensemble supported the second movement effectively, with particularly dramatic forte and fortissimo passages, although the fugal writing was not always fully clear.

Baritone soloist Dominic Sedgewick delivered a confident and commanding account in the third movement, matched by accurate and responsive choral singing in demanding passages. While some contrapuntal textures lacked clarity, the movement concluded strongly. The well-known fourth movement was rendered with tenderness, its fugal sections particularly successful, alongside Brahms's shifting rhythmic patterns.

Soprano Elizabeth Findon was equally impressive in the fifth movement, her clarity and projection standing out. Balance across the ensemble was generally good, though harder to assess from nearer seating positions. The sixth movement maintained a strong tempo and opened effectively, building to a final section of conviction and a powerful conclusion.

The final movement began with excellent balance, including a particularly effective passage pairing soprano/alto with tenor/bass lines. The closing pages sustained the expressive intensity that characterised the performance throughout. This was a demanding work, requiring stamina and commitment, both of which were clearly evident. Epsom Choral Society can be proud of a performance that amounted to a genuine triumph, with the enthusiasm of its members and an influx of new singers pointing to a strong future.

Peter Lutton

*Evening song

Epsom resident launches UK Choir of the Year

28 April 2026



A Worcester Park resident and former Epsom College music scholar is behind a new national competition celebrating Britain's thriving amateur choral scene.

Lucy Mitchell, founder of **UK Choir of the Year**, is launching the initiative with a fundraising concert at Cadogan Hall in London on 18th May, ahead of the competition opening for entries later this year.

Mitchell, who lives in Worcester Park and is a member of the Adam Street Singers, said the project had been in development for more than a year and aims to highlight the strength and diversity of choirs across the country.

The new competition will open applications in June 2026 and culminate in a live final at Milton Court at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in April 2027.

The launch concert will feature performances from the Adam Street Singers, Citi London Choir and the Lewisham & Greenwich NHS Choir - whose members famously topped the Christmas charts - alongside guest appearances by TV doctor Dr Ranj and The Choir with No Name.

Mitchell said the competition was designed to recognise the many high-quality choirs operating outside the fully professional music sector.

"So many choirs are doing extraordinary work but rarely get the chance to be heard nationally," she said. "This competition exists to celebrate the standard, diversity, and community behind choral singing across the UK."

UK Choir of the Year is being run as a not-for-profit initiative rooted in the belief that collective singing plays an important role in wellbeing and community identity.

Some of the proceeds from the competition will support **The Choir with No Name**, an organisation which runs choirs for people affected by homelessness.

The competition will be judged by leading figures from the UK choral world including composer Will Todd, conductor and vocal specialist Dan Ludford-Thomas and conductor and gospel specialist Karen Gibson MBE.

Funds raised at the Cadogan Hall concert will help develop the competition and create access bursaries to ensure choirs from across the UK are able to take part.

Mitchell said the initiative was intended to celebrate the "richness and diversity" of Britain's choral tradition while creating a national platform for amateur ensembles of all styles and sizes.

Applications for UK Choir of the Year open at the end of June 2026, with the inaugural final scheduled for 10 April 2027.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Three beers for Dorking

28 April 2026



Beer fans will be pumped to know that Dorking Halls will be able to offer customers a greater variety of booze after planning permission was secured to convert storage units into cellars. Antique hunters may be less than thrilled however. Mole Valley District Council has given itself the green light to convert the units at the northwest of the halls so they can be used by the town's flagship theatre. The block had been in long-term use by Dorking auctioneers P F Windibank to keep its wares and will force the company, which been based there for over half a century, to move elsewhere. Officers, who recommended the conversion be approved, said it would support the "popular leisure and cultural facility", Dorking Halls, and help its long-term viability.

They told the March development management committee: "They consider they need more (space), to provide a greater variety of drinks and they need more storage for beer kegs. The proposed change of use would support Dorking Halls and the wider town centre economy. Dorking Halls is an important venue for Mole Valley, it provides opportunities for leisure and recreation both for those living within and outside the district."

John Collins, speaking on behalf of the application, said the increased storage was needed due to the scale of activities and that revenues generated through bar sales underpinned the venue's viability. He said the Dorking Halls was cherished by the community and added: "The current cellarage was simply not adequate and more space needed to improve back of house operations and comfort within the facility. Being able to have a comfortable welcoming place with a decent bar is all part of that experience."

Councillors at the meeting expressed concern over how it would impact the town's antique scene - although that lies outside the committee's remit. Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrat: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "I know Dorking Halls is an extremely precious asset that we have but I do also think this is going to (impact) some of the trade in Dorking. So I am not going to pass judgement or anything but I wanted to make that comment because I think this could be quite a loss for us." Cllr Kirstie Havard (Liberal Democrat: Capel, Leigh, Newdigate and Charlwood) added: "This application is causing great harm to that business they have been there for 80 years. It's arisen after the first phase of Dorking Halls (refurbishment) was completed and it was decided that space was needed, and I understand the reasons, but I'm very worried about Windibank and what they are losing, and it is very harmful to their business."

Chris Caulfield LDRS

Dorking Halls (image Google)

Remarkable Ukrainian who lived his final decades in Epsom

28 April 2026



MICHAEL BIALOGUSKI (1917-84) Ukrainian born Doctor, musician, conductor and spy who spent the last 20 years of his

life in Epsom

Mykolo Bialoguski was born in Kiev (then in Russia, now in Ukraine) on 19 March 1917. His parents, Gregorii and Paulina, were Polish professionals, being a veterinary surgeon and dentist respectively. Gregorii was a non-practising Jew and Paulina a Christian.

Apparently, the family fled Kiev in about 1920, having nearly been shot by Bolsheviks, and from 1927 to 1935 Mykolo attended a secondary school in Wilno, Poland - which is now Vilnius, Lithuania, a graphic illustration of the ever-shifting political sands of Eastern Europe. He studied the viola and began to study medicine.

The Nazis invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, thus triggering World War 2. The political goings-on in relation to Poland at that time were hideously complicated and we shan't dwell on them here, but we do need to know where Mykolo was at the time and why he probably decided to leave. The following map will assist matters - Wilno is in the top right-hand portion and occupied by the Soviets.

In present-day terms Wilno/Vilnius is quite close to the Belarusian border, just over 200 km as the crow flies, and during WW2 Belarus (then the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) was initially under the control of the Soviets: however, in 1941 the Germans invaded and if, like Mykolo, you were both anti-communist and had a Jewish parent, then Wilno was not a place to be under either regime. (If you want to know more about Wilno during WW2 there is ample material on Wikipedia in the articles on Vilna Ghetto and Ponary Massacre.)

Mykolo had married an Irena Vandos in Poland at some point, but they were divorced in 1941. He had already been jailed briefly for protesting against some actions of the occupying Red Army and so, spinning a yarn about going to Curaçao, he travelled across Russia to Japan, the latter not yet having joined in WW2, although it did so in December 1941. Fortunately, Mykolo had arrived in Sydney, Australia by then and became Michael.

So, we are now in Sydney and in 1942 Michael enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps as an orderly; he was then discharged with Government approval and assistance to study medicine at the University of Sydney, which he did successfully. In 1943 he married divorcee Agnes Patricia Humphry (known as Patricia - they were ultimately divorced in 1954). After a year in general practice at Thirroul, a seaside suburb south of Sydney, he set up on Macquarie Street, in central Sydney itself.

Spying

One would think perhaps that building up a practice as a doctor in a thriving city district would be more than enough for any young man, but there were other facets to Michael. He was certainly anti-communism but that in itself doesn't turn you into a spy, especially if you're safely ensconced in Australia. It looks more as if he wanted to 'play spies' because he was fascinated with it all. He offered his services to the Commonwealth Investigation Service (CIS) in 1945 and was engaged as an agent: the CIS was apparently as secure as a chocolate padlock in terms of leaks and had been infiltrated by Soviet spies, which led to the creation of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). In 1949 Michael was engaged as an ASIO agent.

As is usually the case with that era of peculiar 'peace', spies, agents and double agents were everywhere and it was hard for them to know which side anyone was on, let alone any amateur researcher trying to make some sense of it 70 years or so later. Still, it must be done, as it was the man's main claim to 'fame'.

The Petrov Affair

Petrov had started out as Afanasy Shorokhov, born in 1907 to peasant parents in a Central Siberian village. In 1923 he joined an organisation for young communists and then the Soviet Navy, by which time his name had become Vladimir Proletarsky and later Vladimir Petrov. Having worked his way up, slowly, from cipher clerk in the Navy to the MGB (a predecessor of the KGB which dealt with myriad security and intelligence issues) he became third secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Canberra - or, to put it another way, a senior KGB officer and spy control in Australia. It was quite surprising that Petrov had survived Stalin's vicious purges and executions of officials over the years, but he had mainly worked under a very nasty piece of work named Lavrentiy Beria and nobody had managed to get rid of this vile man to date. Beria will become significant in a moment, but, returning to Australia, Petrov met Bialoguski and, against a background of mutual friendship, copious alcohol and prostitutes, Petrov thought he had recruited Bialoguski as a Soviet spy, whereas the latter continued to work for ASIO and was spying on Petrov.

Matters came to a head in 1953 when Stalin died and a power struggle ensued. Beria was confident of working his way to the very top, but certain people, Nikita Khrushchev in particular, had other ideas, and Beria was executed. Bialoguski and his colleague, Ron Richards, used this as part of the argument that Petrov should defect, saying that when he was recalled to the Soviet Union under the new regime, he would be in mortal danger. Another part of the persuasion was a large sum of money.

Petrov did defect in 1954, but had neglected to forewarn his wife, Evdokia (also a spy), who, when recalled by the Soviets, was torn between her sister back home and her husband.

Evdokia decided to cooperate with the Australian authorities. Next came a ghastly episode: she was kidnapped by Soviet agents and dragged kicking and screaming to an aircraft.

A high-ranking Australian official witnessed this and fired off an urgent telegram requesting Prime Ministerial intervention, as it was certain that Evdokia would come to a horrible end if she was taken to Moscow. When the plane landed for refuelling at Darwin, Australian police boarded, extricated her from the kidnappers and asked whether she wanted to go to Moscow or stay in Australia. You can guess what her answer was.

There was subsequently a Royal Commission investigating Soviet espionage in Australia, but there is no need to go into that here, save to say that it generated enormous press coverage and political wrangling. The Petrovs remained in Australia as Australian citizens.

As mentioned earlier, Michael and Patricia were divorced in 1954 and it wasn't an amicable parting. He wrote a book about the Petrov Affair, which was serialised in various newspapers and Patricia went to the papers with her own story. She said that he had a strange, almost weird, personality and that he was a clever, self-absorbed, manipulative and ambitious man who could also be charming and entertaining. This seemed to accord with others' views of him.

Michael was apparently a minor press celebrity for the rest of the 1950s but didn't seem to make significant headway with either his career or finances. In 1957 he applied for a reduction in Patricia's alimony, claiming that he hadn't made much money from the book and that his medical practice had suffered as a result of all the publicity. He got the reduction in alimony and in 1961 he won a libel case over Patricia's published allegations and was awarded £1,000 in damages.

Meanwhile, in 1957 he had married Nonnie Frieda Peifer, then a secretary; she had had a brief career as a film actress in minor roles under the name of Nonnie Piper in the late 1940s/early 1950s. He was still determined to pursue a musical career of some kind, preferably as a conductor, and had actually played the violin in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, but he wasn't getting anywhere on that front.

In about 1964 the family moved to England, where Michael continued to work in medicine but pursued his musical ambitions too. They lived at 24 Shawley Way, Epsom, which by a boundary quirk came under Tattenhams Ward, Banstead for election purposes and is now designated as 'Reigate and Banstead'.

Finally, Michael was able to study conducting and conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1969 he conducted at the Royal Albert Hall, then he formed the Commonwealth Philharmonic Orchestra and also wielded the baton in Westminster Abbey. Perhaps at last he had found his true vocation.

Michael died of cancer on 29 July 1984 at Kingswood, Surrey. Nonnie remained in England and lived until 14 February 2020, aged 89. She was survived by three of her children and several grandchildren.

Linda Jackson 2023

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A surprise glimpse into 1883: Christ Church Epsom Common's Parish Magazine

Epsom author shares personal epilepsy journey amid town's historic link to the condition

28 April 2026



An Epsom author has published a deeply personal account of living with epilepsy, adding a modern voice to a local story that stretches back more than a century.

Madeline Bolton-Smith, who lives in Epsom and works as a probate assistant at a family-run accountancy firm in nearby Fetcham, has written *Diary of an Epileptic*, a book describing her experience of diagnosis, treatment and life with the neurological condition.

Epilepsy affects around one in every hundred people in the UK, yet many newly diagnosed patients still feel isolated when confronting the condition for the first time. Bolton-Smith says her motivation for writing the book was to provide reassurance and solidarity to others navigating similar uncertainty.

"When I was diagnosed with epilepsy, I often felt very alone," she explains. "Writing the book was my way of saying to others in that position that their feelings are valid and that they are not facing it on their own."

Her account follows the realities of living with epilepsy from the moment of diagnosis through investigative medical procedures, struggles to secure treatment funding and undergoing Laser Interstitial Thermal Therapy (LITT) surgery. When the surgery did not bring the hoped-for outcome, she had to confront the challenge of adapting to life with epilepsy once again.

The book reflects openly on the emotional impact of the condition - fear, frustration and isolation - but also the resilience required to continue forward. Bolton-Smith hopes the honesty of her story will help readers and families dealing with epilepsy feel less alone.

Epsom's historical link to epilepsy

Bolton-Smith's story also resonates with a significant but little-known chapter of local history.

In the early twentieth century Epsom was home to the **Ewell Epileptic Colony**, later known as St Ebba's Hospital. Established during a period when epilepsy was poorly understood and widely feared, the colony reflected the prevailing belief that people with the condition should live apart from mainstream society.

Opened in 1903, the colony formed part of the wider Horton Estate of hospitals built by the London County Council to treat mental illness and neurological disorders. Hundreds of patients with epilepsy lived and worked there in what was intended to be a self-contained rural community.

Residents grew food, maintained workshops and followed strict daily routines designed to create stability for those prone to seizures. While some patients experienced relative independence compared with traditional asylum conditions, the colony nevertheless represented an era when epilepsy carried heavy stigma and separation from ordinary life was seen as necessary.

The institution eventually became St Ebba's Hospital and continued operating for decades before closing in the late twentieth century as attitudes and treatments changed.



Remembering the patients buried in Horton Cemetery

The lives of many former residents of the Horton hospitals, including St Ebba's, are remembered today through the work of the **Friends of Horton Cemetery**. The charity seeks to restore this historic Epsom cemetery, the largest asylum cemetery in Europe, to community ownership and researches the lives of those buried there.

More than 9,000 patients from the surrounding hospitals were laid to rest in the cemetery, many with little recognition during their lifetimes. The charity's website, hortoncemetery.org, shares their stories.

The contrast between that earlier era and the present day illustrates how far attitudes toward epilepsy have progressed. Modern medicine emphasises treatment, independence and inclusion rather than segregation.

[CLICK here](#) for the story of Matilda DUNKINSON

Changing understanding of epilepsy

Medical knowledge of epilepsy has advanced dramatically over the past century. Once widely misunderstood and surrounded by superstition, epilepsy is now recognised as a neurological condition caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain.

Treatments today range from anti-seizure medications to specialised surgical procedures such as the LITT therapy Bolton-Smith underwent. Support networks, advocacy groups and greater public awareness have also helped reduce stigma.

Yet challenges remain, particularly for those newly diagnosed. Bolton-Smith believes that sharing lived experiences can play a vital role in helping others understand the realities of the condition.

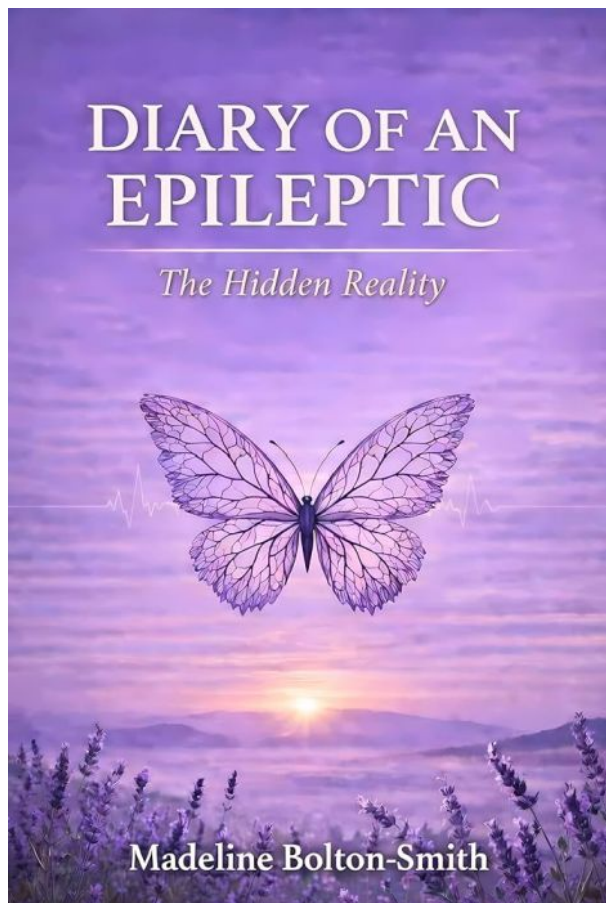
Through *Diary of an Epileptic*, she hopes to contribute to that wider conversation while offering practical reassurance to readers facing similar circumstances.

Diary of an Epileptic: The Hidden Reality is available online.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo: The author on Epsom Common



Epsom has no fear hosting primal premiere

28 April 2026



Valentine's Day brought screams instead of romance to Epsom Picturehouse as Craig Dowsett premiered his directional debut, *Bigfoot: Primal Fear*, on 14 February.

Dowsett began acting shortly after Covid and rose to prominence playing Winnie the Pooh in *Winnie the Pooh: Blood and Honey*, produced by Jagged Edge Productions. After the film's success, he moved into writing and directing, seeking full creative control over his own projects.

Bigfoot: Primal Fear is the first independent Bigfoot horror film shot in the UK and features well known faces from the UK independent film scene. It also stars American Bigfoot expert Ryan "RPG" Golembeske from Expedition Bigfoot and DJ Brewster from Alaskan Killer Bigfoot.

The story follows a group of campers whose woodland getaway turns into a nightmare when they realise they are not alone and something is hunting them. Every step could be their last as they fight to survive. Click [HERE](#) for a trailer:

Made on a small, self-financed budget, the film relies on practical effects, fast pacing and plenty of twists.

Sitting in the audience, my eyes were glued to the screen. The film moved at such a pace it felt over in a flash, each scene building tension and keeping viewers fully engaged. I will now look at Epsom Common very differently. Who knows what might be living there?

"Having our very first red carpet event at Epsom Picturehouse is absolutely amazing," said Dowsett. "Epsom is a fantastic place for red carpet premieres because it has the perfect balance of being intimate yet vibrant, bringing the local community together to celebrate independent cinema. Everyone had an amazing time and went away with magical moments. We will definitely be back later in the year for another premiere."

The film will be released on streaming platforms later this year, with Dowsett encouraging audiences to support independent filmmaking in what he describes as a tough industry, adding that he hopes viewers enjoy the film as much as the team enjoyed creating it.

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Photo: Craig and Emma Dowsett

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