

British Railways' 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

24 November 2025



Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

A free exhibition train celebrating 200 years of the modern railway will arrive at Tattenham Corner station next March as part of a 60-stop national tour.

More than 40,000 people have already visited the touring train, named *Inspiration*, which forms a centrepiece of **Railway 200**, the nationwide programme marking two centuries since the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825. Nine in ten visitors say they would recommend it to a friend.

What visitors can expect

Co-curated with the National Railway Museum, *Inspiration* explores how rail reshaped Britain and the wider world. Displays chart key "railway firsts", interactive engineering challenges and a rapid tour of lesser-known railway careers. The exhibition has been praised as "brilliant", "fascinating" and suitable for all ages.

One visitor reported: "I loved that it was interactive. I visited with people from age 18 to 85 and there was something for everyone." Another said even their five-year-old "absolutely loved it".

The train will be hosted by Southern at **Tattenham Corner station from 9 to 11 March 2026**. Tickets are free but limited.

Tattenham Corner's royal railway history

Tattenham Corner station itself has a long connection with major public events. Opened in 1901, the station was built to provide easier rail access to the Epsom Downs racecourse, particularly for the Derby. According to local historical accounts, the new station offered an alternative to the original Epsom Downs station, which at the time had nine platforms and could be overwhelmed by Derby-day crowds.

It is widely understood that the creation of Tattenham Corner station was encouraged so that **Queen Victoria**, in the final months of her reign, could travel to the racecourse with greater ease and avoid the congestion associated with the older, much busier station. The new alignment brought passengers directly to the famous turn on the Downs from which the station takes its name.

In the decades that followed, Tattenham Corner became a focal arrival point for racegoers, and extra services still run on major racing days.

A milestone for Britain's railways

Railway 200 marks two centuries since Stephenson's *Locomotion No. 1* steamed along the Stockton and Darlington line, an innovation that changed global travel, encouraged mass tourism, shaped timekeeping and sped up industrial development.

The anniversary year has already included a re-run of the original 1825 journey watched by around 100,000 people, commemorative stamps and coins, a global "whistle-up" of more than 200 locomotives, and what organisers describe as the world's largest rail festival.

Angie Doll, Chief Executive of Govia Thameslink Railway, said: "Two hundred years ago the modern railway came into existence and utterly transformed our society. Working together, we hope to educate and inspire young people in rail's past and future. The railway is great for the climate, and helps our local communities thrive."

Emma Roberts, Programme Manager for Railway 200, added: "Inspiration is a fun, free and fascinating way to learn about the past, present and future of rail. There's something for everyone."

Rail Minister Lord Peter Hendy called Britain "the birthplace of the modern railway" and said the touring train aims to inspire a new generation of engineers, drivers, conductors and technicians.

The exhibition has been supported by a £250,000 National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, with Porterbrook providing the livery for the train.

Tickets

Tickets for the Tattenham Corner visit are free but must be booked in advance.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Bit of Epsom history for sale

24 November 2025



A distinctive slice of Epsom’s high street history has surfaced for sale — the original “**Ladies at Lester Bowden**” shop sign, once proudly displayed beneath the old walkway of the famous **Lester Bowden** outfitters in the heart of town. The sign, around seven feet long and built to last, has survived in remarkably good condition thanks to its sheltered position and evokes the golden age of a business synonymous with Epsom’s racing tradition.

For generations, **Lester Bowden** was the name every jockey, trainer and racegoer in Surrey knew. Established in the early 20th century, the gentleman’s outfitters was famed for its bespoke tailoring and equestrian style — a cornerstone of Epsom’s identity as the home of The Derby. In later decades, as fashions evolved, the store expanded to include a dedicated ladies’ section: “Ladies at Lester Bowden,” which served as both a stylish boutique and a symbol of the business’s adaptability.

The building itself has a pedigree even older than the brand. Before Lester Bowden moved in, the site at the corner of the High Street and Spread Eagle Walk was home to one of Epsom’s most historic hostelries — **The Spread Eagle Inn**. For over two centuries, weary travellers, jockeys, and race patrons found food, drink, and lodging there. The Spread Eagle’s name became woven into Epsom’s folklore — a meeting place during Derby week and a landmark at the heart of town life. It even was home to the Epsom Magistrates during a Court refurbishment.

When **Lester Bowden** took over the premises in the mid-20th century, they carried forward the building’s long association with Epsom’s equestrian and social history. Its large, distinctive frontage, tailor’s fittings and wooden signage became part of the visual fabric of the High Street for decades — until the shop’s closure brought the end of an era.

Now, with this **original shop sign** up for sale, a tangible piece of that story is back in circulation. The seller describes it as “about seven feet long,” heavy, and needing two people to lift — a proper relic of a bygone retail age. Protected from the weather under the old walkway, it remains in fine condition and could easily be restored or displayed as an artefact of Epsom’s retail past.

For heritage enthusiasts, collectors, or anyone with affection for Epsom’s racing roots, this is a rare opportunity to own a genuine link to the town’s layered past — one that spans from coaching inns to couture.

Those interested in the sign can find details through this Gumtree ad, but the real story is larger: it’s a reminder that every piece of Epsom’s architecture tells a tale — and that sometimes, those tales are still for sale.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Tracing the history of poor relief in Epsom and

Ewell

24 November 2025



Residents and researchers in the borough now have enhanced access to a fascinating trove of historic records that shed light on how our local community dealt with poverty, welfare and social care from the early nineteenth century onward.

The system of poor relief in England underwent major changes in the 1800s. Under the “Old Poor Law” (before the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act) each parish vestry was responsible for caring for its poor, sick and destitute residents. After 1834, the “New Poor Law” created groupings of parishes into Poor Law Unions, each with a Board of Guardians and a central workhouse.

In Surrey, the Surrey History Centre holds an extensive guide to Poor Law records, including minute books of the county’s Poor Law Unions. For Epsom, the records of the Epsom Poor Law Union from 1836 to 1930 are now indexed and available for consultation.

The minute books of the Epsom Poor Law Union record meetings of the Board of Guardians, who decided whether applicants should receive relief, be admitted to the workhouse, or be “removed” to another parish. They note weekly expenditure, supply orders, the appointment of staff, and the conditions of inmates.

Poor Law records can also include examination papers, bastardy bonds, settlement certificates, removal orders, and workhouse admission and discharge registers. Together they provide a detailed picture of the social realities of life in Victorian and Edwardian Epsom.

Although today a relatively prosperous borough, Epsom’s history includes many households living on the edge of poverty. The Union’s records allow us to trace how local governance responded to hardship, how relief was funded, and how the population’s needs changed across a century.

Behind the official entries lie the human stories: the widowed mother seeking parish relief, the injured labourer, the orphan placed in a workhouse, or the itinerant worker removed from one parish to another. These records reveal the rhythms of ordinary lives and the community’s efforts to care for its own.

The Surrey History Centre’s page *Poor Law records - minute books* offers guidance and shows that indexes to the Epsom minutes (1836-1930) are now online.

Visit:

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre/researchers/guides/poor-law-records/minute-books>

Researchers should first consult the online indexes and then contact the Surrey History Centre to view the original volumes, which may require a visit or advance booking.

Tips for local researchers

- Search by parish as well as by name - many cases are listed under the parish of settlement.
- Note that “removal orders” might show a person being transferred between parishes.
- Combine minute books with census or parish registers for a fuller picture of a family’s circumstances.
- Compare relief volumes across decades to identify periods of local economic stress.

With the indexes now online, there is a fresh opportunity for local historians, schools and community groups to explore Epsom’s welfare legacy. Projects could include exhibitions of anonymised case studies, research into patterns of employment and hardship, or school activities exploring the social history of our borough.

The minute books of the Epsom Poor Law Union open a compelling window onto over a century of social welfare practice. By engaging with these records, we can better understand the changing nature of poverty, relief and governance in Epsom and Ewell - and recover the lives of those who, often in quiet dignity, sought help when times were hard.

If you make a discovery of local interest from these records, *Epsom and Ewell Times* would be pleased to hear from you.

For many more events and projects from the Surrey History Centre [CLICK HERE](#)

Sam Jones - Reporter



A former Epsom Long Grove Hospital patient remembered for his pacifism

24 November 2025



Barney Cohen (1897-1970)

By his nephew, Andy Strowman

There is a very quiet cemetery in London — East Ham Jewish Cemetery. You may be the only visitor there apart from the grave workers. Among the rows of stones lies one marked *Barnett Cohen* — the only one there by that name.

Barney, as the family called him, was born in 1897 in Whitechapel. His parents were Milka (Millie) and Hershel (Harris) Cohen, and the family lived at 17 Milward Street, behind the London Hospital. His brothers were Jack and David, his sisters Rachel and Rose. The same house later became my home too, long before I was born.

Barney grew up in hard times. Like so many of his generation, he left school at fourteen and joined the garment trade. He was gentle by nature, a man who never said a bad word about anyone. I think he lacked confidence — something I have inherited too.

When the Second World War broke out, he enlisted. But when faced with the prospect of killing, he refused. He simply could not harm another human being. For that courage — for it was courage — he was punished. He was placed in the guardhouse and later imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs as a conscientious objector.

In prison he suffered terribly. His weight fell to five and a half stone. My grandmother Millie, desperate to save him, sought help from her sisters in North London. Together, they visited a government office, and — as the old East End saying goes — *the brown envelope changed hands*. Only then was he released.

A retired officer once told me what those conditions were like: “You wouldn’t have liked it in there. Tiny cells, no space, noise all night — shouting, banging, threats. We only stepped in if someone started hitting you.”

Barney came out of prison changed. He was nervous, forever scratching, anxious about his work. If he worked beside his brother Jack, he was always asking, “*Is this all right?*”

When I was sixteen, my mother told me that Uncle Barney had endured six sessions of electro-convulsive therapy at **Long Grove Hospital in Epsom** — the same hospital that later held Ronnie Kray. Long Grove closed in 1992, but its shadow remains.

Yet Barney was no shadow. Despite his suffering, he radiated kindness. He loved to make people laugh, performing little magic tricks that delighted us as children. Once, when I was about eight, he came to visit us during his lunch break from the Ellis and Goldstein factory. While he talked to my mother, I quietly bolted the front door so he couldn’t leave. My mother struggled with the latch and he burst out laughing — a moment of warmth I have never forgotten.

He married Dolly, and my mother, then fourteen, was his bridesmaid. Life was not easy for them. Poverty, mental illness, and misunderstanding strain any family, and in those days help was scarce and sympathy rarer still.

Barney once told a story about visiting London Zoo on a Sunday in his best suit. A commotion broke out near the monkey cage; he joined the crowd, only for one of the monkeys to run off and return — to spit a mouthful of water all over his suit. The crowd roared with laughter, and so did Barney. That was his nature — to laugh even when the joke was on him.

He died in 1970, still working, collapsing at his workplace at Ellis and Goldstein in Aldgate. His brother Jack said simply, “He always lacked confidence. If I was sewing beside him, he kept asking, ‘*Is this all right?*’”

Barney’s life was not easy. He came from poverty, fought private battles with fear and illness, and faced the cruelty of others with quiet dignity. But he also gave laughter, love, and gentleness to those around him.

His was the untold story of so many — the sensitive souls caught in the machinery of war, poverty, and misunderstanding. He suffered because he refused to harm others. That is a kind of heroism that seldom earns medals.

When I think of Uncle Barney, I see not weakness but light — the quiet strength of a man who never stopped being kind, no matter what the world did to him.

I dedicate these words to him, and to all who, like him, struggled to fit into life yet gave it more compassion than it ever gave them.

Andy Strowman

Image: Barney at son's wedding. Barney on right.

You can read many stories of former patients of the cluster of Epsom psychiatric hospitals on the website of The Friends of Horton Cemetery

A snapshot of Romany Gypsy life in Woking

24 November 2025



Written and visual sources for the lived experience of Romany Gypsies in the county are rare so a collection of copy photographs of the Baker family of Sunridge/Sundridge Camp, Old Woking, and a memoir written by Rose Baker (later Burch) recalling her family's life there, make for an extraordinary testimony (reference 10066/1/9). Rose (born 1918) was a twin and one of 13 children of James and Clara Baker. Gems in the collection include a handwritten list of where she and her siblings were born, including in tents, in a meadow by Old Woking cemetery and in 'the little field by the river near the park which is now overgrown' (10066/1/6).Nellie Violet & Rose Baker Jackmans Nursery

The Bakers and other families in the camp worked for Mr Carter at his farm in Kingfield. The work was arduous, and Gypsies provided cheap labour as they were generally not well paid. From the age of 14, Rose worked at Cartbridge Laundry, then at Jackman and Son's Nursery in Egley Road, where some of her sisters were already employed. Annually in September, the family would travel to Hampshire for the hop-picking season. New building byelaws and public health concerns meant that by 1931 Woking Urban District Council compulsorily purchased the privately owned land which the encampment stood on and a year later evicted its nine resident families. The Bakers moved into settled accommodation in Westfield. Rose's son Geoff used her memoir to research his Romany roots and, in the process, collated a whole collection revealing a fascinating insight into their lifestyle. The collection will be a huge help to enquirers tracing their own Gypsy ancestry.

A game of cat and mouse?



This intriguing drawing was discovered among records of Greenfield School, Woking, recently deposited before the school's merger with Hoe Bridge School (10768/1/2/2). The pencil sketch, depicting a cat teacher with a classroom of mice pupils, is captioned, 'But when her Highness is near, Dear Cat you need have no fear'.

Who is the Cat examining the maths paper in her hand, and who is 'her Highness'? Helpfully, though, all the mice are all individually named, including K Green (creator of the artwork) and K Barbier (whose name appears on the maths paper).

The mystery is further deepened by a cryptic poem that accompanies the drawing:

Cat poem

Now look amidst the senior mice,
Serene and calm Her Royal Highness stands,
How could you Cat, suggest these mice
Would game and play in little bands.
Never, never could the Girls' School mice

Be other than polite and nice
When such a Highness took command
And ruled with love that lively band
Dear Cat, in all humility we you advise
To show our portrait (we're sure that's wise)
To that same Royal Highness who here stands
And say you're sorry - we feel she'll understand.

We think the drawing dates from the early 1940s, as some of the names have been traced on the 1939 Register as born around 1926 to 1927, and were most likely senior pupils, as the poem suggests. This was before the school was purchased by Ockenden Venture founders, Joyce Pearce and Ruth Hicks (in 1948), so we are no closer to identifying 'Cat' and 'Her Royal Highness'. If you can help us solve this enigma, we would love to hear from you!

Surrey History Centre.

Read about many other rich and varied events from Surrey History Centre [HERE](#)

Epsom & Ewell's French racing twin is a favourite

24 November 2025



The Château de Chantilly has been selected as Monument Préféré des Français 2025 (France's Favourite Monument), surpassing 13 other iconic sites in a national vote. It succeeds the 24 Hours of Le Mans circuit, which won the honour in 2024.

This accolade was conferred through the popular France 3 television programme *Le Monument Préféré des Français*, presented by Stéphane Bern, which each year invites the public to vote for their favourite heritage site. Stéphane Bern is a well-known French journalist, television and radio presenter, writer and historian. He specialises in European history, royalty and cultural heritage, and is often described in France as the country's "Mr Heritage."

A heightened spotlight on Chantilly

Epsom and Ewell with Chantilly enjoy a twinning charter and both share a proud equestrian heritage. Chantilly is renowned for its racecourse and celebrated training grounds, Epsom is world-famous for the Derby, a race that has shaped the international thoroughbred calendar for over two centuries. This shared identity as centres of horseracing tradition provides a natural bond between the two towns and further enriches their twinning relationship.

The chateau victory not only amplifies the national and international profile of Chantilly but reinforces its status as an exceptional cultural treasure. The château, owned by the Institut de France, houses the Musée Condé, with the Duke of Aumale's art collection and library as its heart. It is also celebrated for its formal gardens, its expansive park and the remarkable Museum of the Horse, housed in the former great stables.

Since the château was designated "Monument préféré des Français," Stéphane Bern presented a commemorative plaque to Anne Miller, the château's administratrice générale. The French Ministry of Culture highlighted that this distinction honours not just architectural splendour, but the unique legacy bequeathed by the Duke of Aumale, reaffirming the château's role as a living site of art, memory and natural heritage.

The Duc d'Aumale: A link across the Channel

A key figure tying Chantilly to our locality is Henri, Duc d'Aumale (1822-1897), a French prince, military officer, scholar, bibliophile and art collector.

After the Revolution of 1848 forced the Orléans family into exile, the Duke of Aumale settled in Twickenham, just across the Thames from Epsom, in a notable residence known as Orleans House.

Although the main house was largely demolished in 1926, the Octagon Room and service wing survive as part of the Orleans House Gallery, now a Grade I listed building. During his stay, the Duke built an imposing library and picture gallery adjacent to Orleans House, housing many of his collections. These collections — including masterpieces by Raphael, Rubens and others — were later transferred back to Chantilly upon his death, forming a substantial part of the Musée Condé's holdings under his no-loans rule.

The Duke also had local ties through the birth of his son, François d'Orléans, duc de Guise, born in Twickenham in 1854. Upon his death in 1897, the Duke bequeathed Chantilly, together with its art, library and collections, to the Institut de

France, under the condition that it be preserved as a museum of French art and history.

Twinning, cultural bridges, and local opportunity

The success of Chantilly in this national competition is a proud moment for Epsom & Ewell, reinforcing the value and impact of town-twinning. Twinning is not merely ceremonial — it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, reciprocal visits, shared projects in art, education and heritage, and deeper understanding between communities.

Nigel Collin, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Town-Twinning Association, commented:

“We warmly congratulate our colleagues in Chantilly for this well-deserved achievement. Anyone who has visited the Château cannot fail to be amazed, not just by its external splendour, but by the staggering depth of works from the 15th to the 19th century — works you can only see in situ here, thanks to the Duke of Aumale’s strict no-loans condition. It really is well worth a visit, and if any residents are interested in visiting via a Twinning Association group, we will be pleased to advise and assist.”

This announcement may inspire renewed interest in twinning visits, themed excursions focusing on heritage, art or gardens, school exchanges, and collaborative cultural programmes. Epsom & Ewell welcomes ideas for reciprocal exchanges with Chantilly, whether joint exhibitions, lectures, or youth projects.

For further information or to register your interest in a Chantilly visit, please contact the Epsom & Ewell Twinning Association via contact@epsomtwinning.com.

Sam Jones - Reporter



King Athelstan returns to Kingston

24 November 2025



Podcaster and historian Tom Holland was in Kingston on Thursday 4th September to mark the 1,100th anniversary of the coronation of King Athelstan, regarded as England’s first monarch.

At a ceremony on Platform 1 of Kingston station, Holland unveiled the name “King Athelstan” on one of South Western Railway’s Class 450 trains. The event was staged with Saxon re-enactors, children from King Athelstan Primary School wearing crowns, and a choir from Tiffin School.

The Bishop of Kingston, Martin Gainsborough, offered a blessing for the train. Dignitaries included local MP Sir Ed Davey, the Mayor of Kingston, Cllr Noel Hadjimichael, and representatives from Malmesbury, where Athelstan is buried, and Oldenburg in Germany, twinned with Kingston.

Remembering England’s first king

Athelstan, the grandson of Alfred the Great, was crowned in Kingston in 925 before becoming known as the first ruler of a united England. While less famous than later monarchs such as William the Conqueror or Elizabeth I, a poll run by *The Rest is History* in 2021 saw him voted England’s “greatest king”.

Kingston played host to the coronation of Athelstan and six other Saxon kings. South Western Railway remains the only operator serving the town, making it a partner in the Kingston 2025 celebrations marking this heritage.

Voices from the ceremony

Tom Holland said: “Who better to have a train named after him than Athelstan, the great Anglo-Saxon king who first set England on track to becoming a united kingdom?”

Peter Williams, Customer and Commercial Director at South Western Railway, added: “As it travels around the network, we hope our train will inspire customers to discover more about Athelstan’s reign, and his coronation in Kingston 1,100 years ago.”

Sir Ed Davey, MP for Kingston and Surbiton and Leader of the Liberal Democrats, described the event as “a little unusual but absolutely in the spirit of the occasion”.

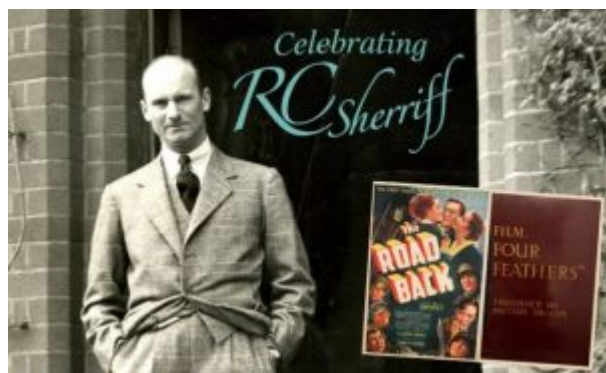
Mayor Noel Hadjimichael called it “a wonderful part of our six-month festival of past, present and future across the royal borough”.

Part of Kingston 2025

The naming ceremony formed part of wider Kingston 2025 cultural celebrations. Later in the day, commemorations continued at All Saints Church, the site of Athelstan’s coronation.

Surrey to mark 50 years since the death of playwright R.C. Sherriff

24 November 2025



This November marks the 50th anniversary of the death of **Robert Cedric Sherriff (1896-1975)**, the Surrey-born playwright and screenwriter best remembered for his First World War play *Journey's End*.

Sherriff, who attended Kingston Grammar School, originally worked as an insurance clerk before serving with distinction on the Western Front. His experiences in the trenches shaped *Journey's End* (1928), the searing drama set in a British officers’ dugout during the last year of the war.

The play, which launched the career of a young Laurence Olivier – barely 21 at the time – was first staged at the Apollo Theatre in London. It became one of the defining anti-war works of its age and continues to be revived on stage and screen nearly a century later.

But Sherriff’s talents extended far beyond the theatre. He went on to become the **highest-paid English scriptwriter in Hollywood**, penning screenplays for classics such as *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1939), *The Four Feathers* (1939), and *The Dam Busters* (1955). His work combined dramatic structure with cinematic flair, leaving an enduring legacy on both sides of the Atlantic.

To mark the anniversary, **Surrey History Centre** is hosting a special event in Woking on **Saturday 8 November (10.30am-12.15pm)**. The programme includes:

- **Dr David Cottis - “RC Sherriff and the Well-Made Screenplay”**
A look at how Sherriff brought stagecraft into cinema, illustrated with material from the Centre’s archives.
- **Roland Wales - “Shirkers or Spies? RC Sherriff in Wartime Hollywood”**
Exploring Sherriff’s move to America during the Second World War, where British expatriates were accused in some quarters of being shirkers at home and even suspected spies abroad. Despite this, their patriotic films resonated strongly with American audiences, helping shape wartime morale.

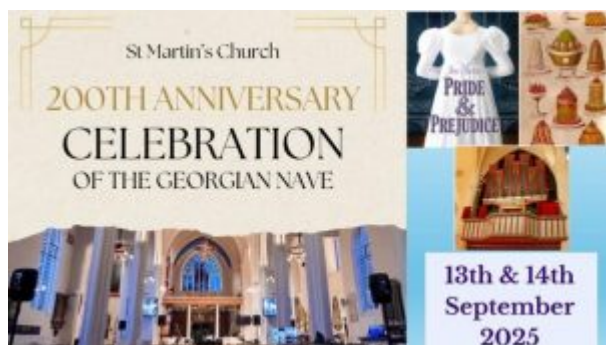
The event will be held both **in person at the Surrey History Centre, Woking (130 Goldsworth Road, GU21 6ND)**, and online via Zoom. Tickets cost **£6** and must be booked in advance. [Book HERE](#)

For those interested in Surrey’s literary heritage, the occasion provides a rare chance to revisit the remarkable career of a local man who made a global impact – from Kingston schoolboy to West End dramatist, Hollywood insider, and chronicler of the war generation.

For more news and events from Surrey History Centre [CLICK HERE](#)

Epsom’s Parish Church Marks 200 Years

24 November 2025



This September, Epsom pauses to celebrate the 200th anniversary of its parish church, the Church of St Martin of Tours. For two centuries the building has stood at the centre of town life — a place of worship, history, and identity for Epsom and Ewell.

The anniversary weekend will feature a range of special events. On Sunday 14 September at 3pm, historian Peter Ross will deliver a talk entitled *Dining with James and Jane: Eating at Home with the Georgians*. Drawing on the vivid diaries of Norfolk clergyman James Woodforde (1758–1802), who recorded every meal he ate, and the letters and novels of Jane Austen, Ross will reveal the food, manners, and household rhythms of Georgian England. His illustrated lecture will include images of paintings, prints, cookery books, and everyday domestic objects, offering a glimpse into the lives of our Georgian forebears. The afternoon will conclude with tea, followed by a service of Choral Evensong.

A stone laid in 1825

On 19 May 1825, the Rev. Joseph Darby, vicar of Epsom, laid the first stone of a new parish church. The medieval church that had stood for centuries was by then both too small and in disrepair. A meeting in 1823 resolved — after some debate — to rebuild. The sturdy medieval tower at the north-west corner was spared, along with the ancient font and wall memorials, but the remainder was swept away.

The contractors, William Blofield of London, working to plans by architect Mr Hatchard of Pimlico, expanded the footprint of the building. Side aisles were widened and lengthened, the west front was advanced, and new staircases and galleries provided for greater capacity. The rebuilt church could now seat around 1,120 parishioners.

At the stone-laying ceremony, Rev. Darby was presented with a handsome silver trowel, inscribed to mark the moment. Sadly, the trowel has since been lost, but the act it commemorated continues to shape the heart of Epsom today.

Victorian Epsom: railways and renewal

Within a generation, however, Epsom was changing again. The arrival of the railway in the 1840s transformed the town from a quiet settlement of around 3,300 people into a rapidly growing commuter hub. Two lines, one from London Bridge and another from Waterloo, brought new residents and prosperity. By the mid-nineteenth century, the population had more than doubled.

The parish church once again felt the strain. Inadequate for the growing congregation, its galleries deemed unsightly, and its facilities cramped, it became the subject of another ambitious rebuilding plan. The vicar at the time, Rev. Waldegrave Bainbridge-Bell, rallied support from influential local figures, including Lord Rosebery and Sir Thomas Bucknill MP.

There was even talk that Epsom Parish Church might become the cathedral of a proposed new Diocese of Guildford. With such aspirations in mind, the architects Nicholson and Corlette were commissioned to draw up a design of “cathedral proportions”.

The 1908 extension

In August 1907, the foundation stone for the grand new east end was laid. A year later, on St Martin’s Day (11 November 1908), the Bishop of Winchester consecrated the new extension. The project cost £13,000 — a significant sum at the time — and gave the church much of the form it has today.

Not all of the plans could be realised: financial pressures meant the most ambitious elements of the Nicholson and Corlette design were never completed. But the east end remains one of Surrey’s most impressive ecclesiastical interiors, a testimony both to the ambition of its builders and to Epsom’s growth in the early twentieth century.

What remains today

Today, three key layers of history meet in the building:

- The medieval tower, the oldest surviving structure in Epsom.
- The 1825 nave and west end, the fruit of the first great rebuilding.
- The 1908 east end, marking the town’s Edwardian expansion.

Together, they tell a story not only of the parish church but of the town itself: medieval market village, Georgian spa settlement, Victorian commuter suburb, and Edwardian provincial centre.

Looking to the future

While this year’s anniversary recalls the laying of the 1825 foundation stone, there are further milestones ahead. In just three years’ time, the church will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its great east end. That event, too, will provide an

opportunity for reflection and celebration.

For now, parishioners and townsfolk alike are invited to join in the September festivities — to mark 200 years since the church we know today began to rise from the foundations of its medieval predecessor.

As one of Epsom's most enduring landmarks, St Martin's stands not only as a house of worship but also as a witness to the town's history. Its tower and walls have looked down on 200 years of change. In celebrating this anniversary, the community also honours the generations who built, rebuilt, and preserved Epsom's parish church at the heart of civic life.

Two new Epsom and Ewell virtual day trips unveiled

24 November 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched two new inclusive tours, part of their *Virtual Day Trips* series, in partnership with Whistlestop Tours. These tours explore Epsom and Ewell, shining a spotlight on the history and cultural heritage of the borough.

The Virtual Day Trips can be watched online for free - from the comfort of home, a school classroom, or in shared community spaces. They include film and audio, with immersive resource packs and memory boxes also available to bring the tours to life.

The Epsom and Ewell Virtual Day Trips were funded by the Arts, Culture and Heritage UKSPF 2024/25 allocation. They sit alongside the *Nonsuch Formal Gardens* tour produced in 2024.

This project is part of the council's strategy to widen access to local history, allowing people to engage in a way that is comfortable to them.

The tours last around 30 minutes. Highlights include:

- Architectural elements from Nonsuch Palace near the Assembly Rooms in Epsom town centre
- Meeting residents and hearing about their passions, from throwing pottery to playing the bandura, the national instrument of Ukraine
- A rare peek inside the Watch House on Ewell High Street
- Ghost stories from local residents
- A behind-the-scenes tour with the Epsom Beekeepers Association

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said:

"I have lived in the borough of Epsom & Ewell for many years, and I found these tours completely fascinating. I thoroughly recommend them, whether you are new to the borough, a long-time resident like me, or someone who is interested in the local area - they can be enjoyed by everyone.

These two new inclusive Virtual Day Trips show our commitment to increasing access to our borough's rich history and cultural heritage. They will help people really get to know our fantastic local area."

Virtual Day Trips

Explore here:

Epsom
Ewell

The first Virtual Day Trip produced was Nonsuch Park.

Digital tours are also available on Bloomberg Connects:

- Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve
- Nonsuch Park

The Virtual Day Trips have been developed by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in partnership with Whistlestop Arts, Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell Library, Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom Beekeepers Association, Parkinson's Choir,

Walk & Talk 4 Men - Surrey, Epsom Pots, and local residents.

About Whistlestop Arts

Whistlestop Arts is run by two creatives:

- *Annalees Lim* - a freelance artist with extensive community arts experience, particularly in disability arts and accessible projects. She is also an illustrator and children's activity book author.
- *Luna Russell* - a maker and arts facilitator passionate about the positive impact of the arts. She has managed projects for Chichester Festival Theatre, Chichester Cathedral, Surrey Arts and Horsham District Council, as well as leading community arts programmes.

Whistlestop Arts Virtual Day Trips

Virtual Day Trips are presented by Annalees and Luna, who meet local people and share their stories. Each trip includes films, podcasts and craft activities.

Full-length films are designed for use in group settings such as care homes and day centres, with built-in pause points for activities. Resource packs are available to enhance the experience.

For more information, visit: [Whistlestop Arts - Virtual Day Trips](#)

Luna Russell and Annalees Lim beside Emily Davison statue in Epsom. Credit **Whistlestop Arts**

Epsom commemorates VJ day

24 November 2025



St Martin's Church, Epsom, was filled on Friday 15th August as the borough came together to mark the 80th anniversary of VJ Day - the end of the Second World War in the Far East. The service, organised by the Royal British Legion's Epsom and Ewell branch, brought together civic leaders, veterans, families, choirs and the wider community to commemorate those who served and those who never came home.

The service was led by Revd Nick Parish, who in his opening prayer set the tone:

"God, our Father, in the dying and rising of your Son, Jesus Christ, you have brought life and salvation out of cruelty and death. We mark VJ Day in gratitude for the courage of the allied forces who suffered for freedom in the Far East campaign, and in sorrow for all that hinders the coming of your kingdom of peace. Give us wisdom to learn from the bitter memories of war and hearts that long for the unity of all nations."

A personal touch from local families

Among the most moving contributions came from Mrs Sheila Carlson-Berry, who read extracts from her late father Douglas Fletcher's letters home from Burma. Fletcher, who had volunteered for the RAF at 19, wrote more than 250 letters to his sweetheart Sylvie during his service.

From October 1944 he wrote with cautious optimism:

"I suppose by the time you receive this European war will be just about finished. What a wonderful thought. It must make the people at home very happy... loved ones at home free from all danger. That, of course, is the main reason for our joy. The other is that now we can have the men and materials out here to put an end to this."

In another letter, he reflected on the "forgotten" nature of the Burma campaign:

"Most people don't realise there's a war on out here. It's only the people who have someone here that understand what is happening. The children have suffered most. It will take years to erase horrible memories from their minds. Man's inhumanity to man - a terrible war, isn't it?"

By August 1945, as the atomic bombs fell on Japan, Fletcher wrote with relief:

"So it's all over. Hard to believe, isn't it? It came so suddenly, but there it is. It will make things so much easier... Yes, the atomic bomb is a terrible weapon, but I think we have it to thank for the Jap surrender... I sincerely hope it will be the last war on this earth. War is too terrible a business. So many innocent people have to suffer."

Sheila told the congregation: "As you probably guessed, Douglas is my dad. Sylvie, my mum. He never forgot his comrades. Each Remembrance Day, I went with him to Westminster, and he cried as he planted a cross in the garden for his friend and pilot, Godwin Scudamore, who didn't make it home."

The stories of Epsom's fallen

Cllr Dr Graham Jones MBE and the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael Molyneux, read researched accounts of four Epsom men who lost their lives in the Far East campaign.

- **Sergeant Jack Cannon**, Royal Artillery, died 28 February 1944 aged 30 at Imphal, India: "Jack married Nora Rush in 1940, and a year later their son Anthony was born. After just a year with his family, Jack was sent to India... He was killed in action during a Japanese attack and later interred at the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in Imphal. His widow Nora requested the inscription: *'To a beautiful life came a sudden end, and he died as he lived, everyone's friend.'*"
- **Corporal Lionel William Murray**, Dorset Regiment, killed at the Battle of Kohima, 4 May 1944, aged 28: "Before the war he lived with his mother in Langley Vale. He was evacuated from Dunkirk, then sent to India to train in jungle warfare. At Kohima he fought in bitter hand-to-hand combat and was killed in action. His gravestone reads: *'In loving memory of a beloved son and brother. Rest in peace.'*"
- **Lance Bombardier Alfred William Cates**, Royal Artillery, died of cholera 26 July 1943 aged 42: "Stationed in Singapore, he was taken prisoner in February 1942 and sent to work on the notorious Thailand-Burma Death Railway. His widow Emma chose the words: *'So young, so calm, so bright, I bid you, my dearest one, goodnight.'*"
- **Noel Seymour**, RAF wireless operator, died 14 October 1943 aged 21: "Taken prisoner in Singapore, he too was forced to work on the Burma Railway, where some 30 prisoners died every day. Noel was one of them. He lies in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand, and his name is remembered on the war memorial in this very church."

Tributes from today's leaders

Helen Maguire MP for Epsom and Ewell, whose grandfather had served in Burma, spoke of both the past and her own military service: "Those who served in the Burma campaign were referred to as the Forgotten Army, and today we remember them and we honour them... My grandfather fought in the Battle of Kohima, a brutal and decisive turning point in the war. Like many who served there, he never spoke of his experiences, but it was clear the war stayed with him for the rest of his life. I remember him today with pride, gratitude and honour."

Maguire linked her own military service in Bosnia and Iraq to the experiences of those remembered:

"War is cruel and it affects innocent people. It's something civilians should never have to live through. Today, I remember my grandfather and those he served with. I remember those who didn't come home, and I remember too the lasting impact of service on families, on lives and on future generations. We give thanks for peace and pray for an end to wars."

Community effort

Barb Warwick, principal organiser with the Epsom RBL, later thanked the many contributors, from choirs and standard bearers to the volunteers who served over 100 cups of tea and cake in St Martin's Hall. She acknowledged the "wonderful trumpeter Mr Dennis Sexton" for sounding the Last Post, and Tom Davey representing 135 Squadron.

Warwick reflected that this was "almost certainly the last service of its kind" and praised those who helped plan the event, especially John Rogers and Revd Nick Parish: "You did them proud."

Remembering the Forgotten Army

The commemoration at St Martin's - once known as the "Burma Star church" - brought together personal memory, civic duty, and community remembrance. The letters of Douglas Fletcher, the stories of Cannon, Murray, Cates and Seymour, and the testimonies of descendants and leaders ensured that those from Epsom who served in the Far East will not be forgotten.

As the exhortation reminded the packed congregation: *"We will remember them."*

You can watch the full service on this video link: [Epsom and Ewell VJ Day Commemoration](#)

Image: Barb Warwick of Royal British Legion Epsom and Ewell the principal organiser of the event.

What has kept us well in Surrey through the ages?

24 November 2025



How have people in Surrey looked after their wellbeing through the centuries – and what can we learn from them today? That's the question behind a new year-long heritage and wellbeing initiative backed by the National Lottery.

It's Not Your Birthday But... (INYBB), a Surrey-based arts and social impact organisation, has been awarded £99,781 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver *What Keeps Us Well*, in partnership with the Surrey History Centre (SHC). The project runs from **August 2025 to July 2026**.

Drawing on six miles of historic records held at SHC – ranging from medieval manuscripts to community newsletters – the project will explore how people across Surrey have maintained wellbeing through food, exercise, creativity, connection, and community.

INYBB's artistic team will collaborate with archivists and three local partner groups to deliver the programme:

- **The Halow Project**, supporting neurodiverse young people in Guildford and Woking
- **Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum**, promoting inclusion and cultural understanding
- **Surrey Youth Groups**, including LGBTQ+ youth, carers and neurodiverse teens in Woking and Knaphill

Together, they will develop:

- **36 creative workshops**
- **Training and community events** at the Surrey History Centre
- **A co-created exhibition** showcasing historic sources and new creative responses
- **A short documentary film**
- **A published anthology** of written work
- **A digital wellness guide**
- **An open call for artists and writers** to create new work inspired by archive material

The project aims to reach over **46,500 people**, with a strong emphasis on engaging communities currently underrepresented in heritage activities.

"At a time when mental health challenges are increasing across our communities, this project will highlight how stories from the past can inspire wellness today," said an INYBB spokesperson.

How to Get Involved

- **Volunteers** are invited to help with exhibitions, research and more
- **Venues** (libraries, community centres, health hubs) are encouraged to host the free exhibition
- **Artists and writers** will be invited to respond creatively to archive materials through an open call launching this autumn

To register interest or find out more, visit itsnotyourbirthdaybut.com or follow [@itsnotyourbirthdaybut](https://twitter.com/itsnotyourbirthdaybut) on social media.

About INYBB

It's Not Your Birthday But... (INYBB) is a creative organisation working across Surrey and the South East to support wellbeing through arts and social connection. It runs participatory projects that explore identity, place, and belonging – often in partnership with community groups and public bodies. The name reflects the idea that celebration, support and attention shouldn't be limited to birthdays alone – everyone deserves moments of care and connection, every day.

See [HERE](#) more news from the Surrey History Centre

Image: The Centurions group was founded at a meeting of long-distance walking enthusiasts held on 11 May 1911. Courtesy SCC