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King Athelstan returns to Kingston

7 September 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".

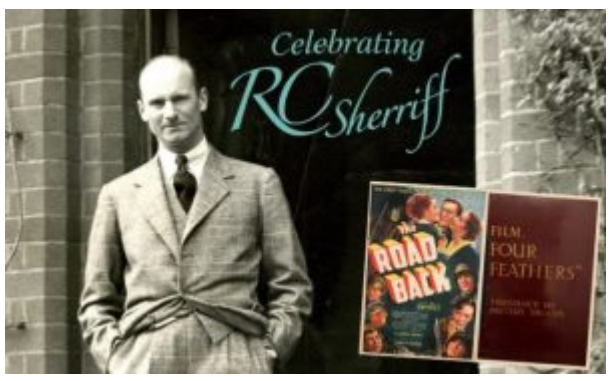
Mayor Noel Hadjimichael called it "a wonderful part of our six-month festival of past, present and future across the royal borough".

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

7 September 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

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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

7 September 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

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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

7 September 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

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- 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

7 September 2025



St Martin’s Church, Epsom, was filled on Friday 15th August as the borough came together to mark the 80th anniversary

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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."

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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?

7 September 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.

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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 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

12,000 years of Surrey history to spring to life

7 September 2025



Fetcham Springs, Surrey – One of Surrey's most important archaeological sites has secured £250,000 in National Lottery Heritage Fund backing to launch a groundbreaking five-year community archaeology initiative.

The Communities at the River: The Fetcham Springs Archaeology Project, led by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU), will uncover over 12,000 years of human history while offering local people opportunities to get involved through volunteering, open days, and educational events.

Thanks to National Lottery players, the funding will expand on discoveries made in 2009 at the site, which revealed evidence of a prehistoric hunting camp dating from the end of the last Ice Age and a high-status Roman building. The new phase of work will explore periods ranging from the Ice Age to the Saxon era.

Hands-on history for all

The project, developed by SCAU's Community Archaeologist Hannah Potter, includes:

- **Volunteering on live archaeological digs**
- **Public open days** showcasing findings
- **Workshops** including **flintknapping** and even **gladiator training**
- **Visits from Stone Age and Roman reenactors**
- **Free school visits and loan boxes** for educational use

Fetcham Springs, which also holds the Wildlife Trust's Biodiversity Benchmark, is owned by SES Water, who are a key project partner and will help support landscape conservation alongside the archaeological work.

A legacy for the future

Findings will be shared through a pop-up museum, exhibitions, talks, and online resources, ensuring a lasting educational impact.

Cllr Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader of Surrey County Council and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

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“Surrey has a rich and diverse history, and projects like Fetcham Springs help us preserve and share our heritage with future generations. This initiative will provide valuable educational and volunteering opportunities, allowing residents to actively engage with archaeology and deepen their understanding of our county’s past.”

Stuart McLeod, Director for England (London & South) at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, added:

“Projects like this inspire people of all ages to connect with their local heritage. We’re proud to support Fetcham Springs, thanks to National Lottery players.”

Grace Wood-Lofthouse, Sustainability Manager at SES Water, commented:

“Water at Fetcham Springs has supported life for millennia. This project will help us better understand how to protect our landscapes for the future.”

For further details, visit the Surrey County Archaeological Unit website.

Image: Archaeologists at work – Cleaning a Roman wall at Fetcham Springs in 2009

Epsom’s infamous murders

7 September 2025



Epsom has witnessed several notable murder cases throughout the 20th century. These incidents, though tragic, have become part of the town’s history.

Epsom is best known for its racing heritage, Georgian elegance and green Surrey charm — but it also holds its share of darker history. Between 1901 and 2000, the town was the site of several shocking murders that unsettled its sense of peace and left a permanent imprint on local memory. Here are three of the most notable.

The 1919 Epsom Riot and the Death of Station Sergeant Thomas Green

On the night of **17 June 1919**, only seven months after the Armistice, Epsom found itself in the grip of a riot that had little precedent in the town’s history. The trouble came not from locals, but from **hundreds of Canadian soldiers** stationed at nearby Woodcote Park Camp. Frustrated by delays in repatriation after the end of World War I, the men — many of them battle-hardened veterans — were increasingly restless.

After one of their own was arrested during an earlier pub disturbance, a crowd of between **300 and 800 soldiers marched on Epsom Police Station**, demanding his release. Violence broke out, and **Station Sergeant Thomas Green**, a 51-year-old veteran officer and father of five, was struck on the head by a wooden post and seriously injured. He died the next day in hospital.

The aftermath shocked the country. Seven Canadian soldiers were tried at the Surrey Assizes. Though the **murder charge was dropped** and replaced by manslaughter, to avoid the risk of the diplomatic nightmare of execution, they were convicted only of **riot** and received sentences of **one year in prison**. But due to diplomatic sensitivities — and the fact that Britain was hosting Canada’s forces — most served just a few months before being quietly released.

To this day, Green is commemorated locally. A **blue plaque** marks the site of the incident, and his grave lies in **Ashley Road Cemetery**. The riot remains a rare example of post-war military unrest spilling onto English streets — and one of the town’s earliest 20th-century murders.

The 1930 Horton Lane Murder of Agnes Kesson

In June 1930, the peaceful lanes around Horton — home to several psychiatric hospitals at the time — became the scene of a macabre discovery. The **body of 20-year-old Agnes Kesson**, a young Scottish woman working as a waitress, was found dumped in a ditch beside Horton Lane.

Agnes had been living in Epsom while engaged to a man named **Robert Duncan Harper**, a local labourer with a reputation and a nickname: **“Scotch Bob.”** Initial suspicion naturally fell on Harper, especially as they were last seen together, and witnesses had allegedly overheard arguments. However, police found **no conclusive evidence**, and Harper was released.

Despite inquiries, door-to-door searches and press appeals, **no one was ever charged** with the killing. The murder gripped the town — not only because of its brutality but because of the location: Horton Lane was a route many walked

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daily, close to the sprawling mental hospital estates that added their own shadows to Epsom's identity.

Though largely forgotten now, the case remains **unsolved**, and Kesson lies in an unmarked grave. Local historians continue to investigate the files, hoping for fresh insight into what was then one of Surrey's most talked-about unsolved crimes.

The 1970 Murder of Ann Smith

On the morning of January 28, 1970, two stable lads from Treadwell Stables, Noel Flanagan and Roger Harris, were exercising horses on Epsom Downs when they discovered the body of a young woman in a ditch near a footpath between Downs Road and Burgh Heath Road. The victim was partially clothed, and her tights and underwear were found nearby, but her shoes, handbag, and money were missing. She had been strangled, battered, and possibly raped before being transported to Epsom and dumped in the ditch.

The woman was later identified as 20-year-old Ann Smith (née Malone), who had been living in Crokerton Road, Tooting. She was separated from her 19-year-old husband, Thomas James Smith, and had a young son. A team of 40 detectives, led by Detective Chief Superintendent Ken Etheridge, investigated the case. Initially, police considered links to other cases, such as the Hammersmith Nude Murders and the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, but these connections were eventually dismissed.

Despite extensive efforts, the murder of Ann Smith remains unsolved. The case is documented in the National Archives under the reference: "A SMITH: victim of unsolved murder. Body discovered in a ditch on Epsom Downs on 28 January 1970."

The 1998 Murder of Lee Harris

The fourth is also the most chilling. In the early hours of **4 September 1998**, **Lee Harris**, a 30-year-old man, was asleep in his ground-floor flat on **Rutland Close**, near Longmead in Epsom. Around 1:30 a.m., three masked men forced entry. In a brutal attack, Harris was **stabbed multiple times and shot in the chest**. His girlfriend, who was also home, was unharmed but left traumatised.

Neighbours reported hearing screams and a car speeding away. Police said it appeared to be a **targeted attack**. Harris had no known serious criminal ties, and his family maintained he had no enemies. Despite a large manhunt, interviews with over 100 people, and ballistic and forensic analysis, **no suspects were ever identified**.

The murder of Lee Harris remains **officially unsolved**. It sent shockwaves through a community unused to such violence and still resonates today as one of Epsom's most disturbing modern crimes.

Final Thoughts

These four cases span different eras and different motives — military unrest, intimate violence, and possibly gang-related vengeance. But they share a haunting link: **none of the perpetrators were ever convicted of murder**. Each case remains incomplete, a story without justice.

Image: Sergeant Green's funeral, Epsom 1919 **public domain**

Anti-slavery Parliamentarian portrait purchase

7 September 2025



Runnymede Borough Council has agreed to release thousands of pounds to help buy a "significantly important" oil painting for its museum. The painting is an oil on canvas portrait of Britain's first foreign secretary and one-time leader of the Whig Party, Charles James Fox MP.

Mr Fox, who spent his final years in St Ann's Hill, Chertsey, was a strong supporter of parliamentary reform and advocated for religious tolerance and individual liberty. He was a particularly vocal campaigner for the abolition of slavery and introduced what was to become the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act which made it illegal for British ships and British subjects to trade in enslaved people.

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The portrait has been offered to the museum for £5,000 and half of the money for its purchase will come from donations, with the rest from the council's museum after Runnymede Borough Council's corporate management committee signed off the move.

Emma Warren, curator of Chertsey Museum, told the Thursday June 19 meeting: "We've been given the opportunity to purchase an original oil painting, quite a large item, of one of the borough's, if not the country's, unsung heroes." She said the money would come from the museum's own fund which had been "built up over many many years and can only be used for the benefit of the museum's collections."

"In my time at Chertsey Museum, which is 23 years, we've only used the purchase fund four times which is why it's healthy. It's normally kept for items of significant importance which I believe this painting to be, given we only have a couple of portraits of Fox and no original artworks. I could talk literally for hours about him. He is important not just to Chertsey where he spent his final years living on St Anne's Hill. Normally I mention his debauched young life with the women and gambling but I was told to skip over that and concentrate on the important bit as to why he was our unsung hero."

Reports presented to the meeting said Mr Fox, who was known as the Man of the People, first came to Chertsey in 1783 when Elizabeth Armistead, who would become his wife, invited him to join her at her home in St Ann's Hill. The museum's collection features letters from Mr Fox and gives an insight into his life on the hill. He was said to have taken up sheep rearing and learned about planting requirements for crops.

Mrs Warren added: "He was a Whig politician, had an unwavering support for liberty and parliamentary reforms and anti-slavery principles. Many of his views were quite ahead of his time. He spoke out at length against anti-government overreach."

The image produced here is NOT the one the subject of this report.

Image: Joshua Reynolds portrait of Charles James Fox- pl.pinterest.com, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=48763729 This is not likely to be the portrait that is the subject of this article. We have been waiting for details from the museum.

Surrey house of distinction gets £200K to repair

7 September 2025



One of the great Surrey buildings will have another £200,000 of repair work after its owners said they were "morally obligated" to maintain the special 19th century site. Pippbrook House is a Grade II* listed building, 'a distinction' English Heritage only bestows on about 5 per cent of all listed properties. The decision to increase the repair budget from £1.4m to £1.6m was made by Mole Valley District Council's cabinet on Tuesday, June 17, so that parts of the building that were damaged by a historic leak in October 2023 can be fixed – and to make it easier to finish the roof repairs.

Councillor Nick Wright, cabinet member for leisure and community assets, said the council had a 'moral obligation" to repair the famous Dorking building. He added: "It is very much a valued local asset. We do need to find other creative ways of funding some of the work that needs to be done, but you can't do that if you've got holes in your roof. We're not denying that there are challenges there, there are significant challenges…but these works are necessary."

In February 2023, the council originally approved a budget of £3.1m for works required to fix Pippbrook House – with £1.6m coming from Mole Valley and the rest obtained through grants. Unfortunately for the council, it was unable to bring in any external cash, limiting the overall scale of what could be achieved. This caused the council to change course and in November 2023 £1.4m was released to begin necessary work to weatherproof Pippbrook House.

The new work will also open up two rooms that cannot be used due to ceiling damage, the meeting heard, matching one of the council's objectives of bringing Pippbrook back into use. Pippbrook House was built between 1856 and 1858 and designed by the architect behind Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras station, George Gilbert Scott. Cllr Gary Sevenoaks, who chairs the council's scrutiny committee, said questions needed to be asked as to why the council was unable to secure a grant for the remaining £1.5m needed to fully repair the building.

Pippbrook House (image Google)

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Surrey talk for those not afraid of Virginia Woolf

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“Mrs Dalloway” at Woking. Celebrating the 100th anniversary of Virginia Woolf’s iconic novel from the Lushington Archive at Surrey History Centre

Virginia Woolf’s use of members of her own family and close friends as models for her characters is well known. Her father, that eminent of all eminent Victorians, Sir Leslie Stephen was the curmudgeonly Mr Ramsay in To The Lighthouse and her mother, the beautiful Julia Jackson, is sensitively portrayed as his long-suffering wife. Other characters in the novel are drawn from friends who were invited to stay with the family at Talland House where the Stephen family spent their summer holidays. One of those families was that of the lawyer and positivist, Vernon Lushington whose daughter Kitty married newspaper owner Leopold Maxse and became the model for Mrs Dalloway in Woolf’s iconic novel.

To celebrate the centenary of the publication of Mrs Dalloway, Dr David Taylor will tell the story of Kitty Maxse and her relationship with Virginia Woolf and other members of her family from the Lushington family archive held at Surrey History Centre. This talk will follow the Surrey History Trust AGM.

Location: Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 6ND.

Date and time: Monday 30 June, 7pm to 9pm.

Tickets: free, register online.

Surrey History Centre for more news click HERE

Farnham Museum repairs hitting £2M

7 September 2025



The cost of repairing “one of the most important buildings in Surrey” has ballooned to nearly £2 million after further setbacks were discovered – with Waverley Borough Council now on the hook for about three quarters of a million pounds.

The Grade 1 listed Farnham Museum has been protected due to the exceptional interest in its rare design. Its listing places it alongside some of the nation’s most famous landmarks including Buckingham Palace, Hampton Court and the Cenotaph.

In March 2023, funding for the project was secured after the Arts Council gave Waverley Borough Council a grant of £734,335 for essential repairs to its Wilmer House, Georgian home, in West Street.

The council-owned building had fallen into disrepair with the cash used to address decaying brickwork, its collapsing second floor window arches, and deeply eroded mortar joints.

Further exploratory work uncovered a wrath on additional problems with the budget growing ever since. Senior councillors has described the work as vital to protecting the “extremely valuable building” and that describing its worth in monetary terms “felt a little grubby”.

Following the Tuesday, June 3, meeting of Waverley Borough Council, which agreed to set aside an additional £243,000 for the project, the total cost is expected to be £1,720,000 – of which £735,000 will be funded by the council.

Councillor Kika Mirylees, portfolio holder for community services and leisure said: “Wilmer House is a grade one listed building and is extremely rare being one of fewer than 20 buildings of its type..

“As a grade one listed building it sits alongside other somewhat more famous buildings such as Buckingham Palace, Hampton Court, the Tower of London and the Cenotaph. However, as we know, the challenges that come with a grade 1

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listed building are not easy."

She added: "The first phase was always going to be one of uncertainty, we knew that, until the scaffolding came down and we saw what was lying behind it. The extra funding we need will be for the parapet wall and the two chimneys, which will make up the majority of the extra funding because we can not leave them as they are.

"Their deterioration is much greater than expected and they were not part of the tendered contract. "Like it or not Waverley has a statutory obligation to carry out the repair work in a timely manner due to planning law and health and safety concerns – and the funding given to us by the Arts Council."

It is expected that the work will take about 18 weeks to complete and will be finished by mid October, the meeting heard. Any delay would have a knock on effect and push the project into the next year, resulting in a third consecutive winter shut down and costing a further £69,000.

Cllr Mark Merryweather, portfolio holder for finance, assets and property added: "When you go up there and have an expert explain to you the history of the building, the skill that went into the original works there, it almost feels slightly grubby to start monetising it, because it is an extremely valuable building.

"But having said that we have to, we are a council, we have a responsibility – not only to our taxpayers, but to Farnham and the borough, and to the nation because this is a nationally important building.

"In our stewardship and custody I am confidant its going to be looked after the way it should. Its disappointing we've found more work that needs to be doing but no one can say we weren't fully aware of the risk."

Museum of Farnham JT initials (Image Google)

News and events from Surrey History Centre

7 September 2025



Surrey Photographers: A Day of Talks

Join the **Surrey Local History Committee** for a fascinating day of illustrated talks on the history of photography in Surrey. Experts will explore a variety of themes:

- **Keith Harding**: *Victorian Dorking in photographs by Walter Rose & John Chaplin*
- **Nigel Balchin**: *Picture postcards and local history*
- **Jane Lewis and Jill Hyams** (Surrey History Centre): *Portrait of a Surrey town between the wars: the photographic archive of Sidney Francis*
- **Julian Pooley** (Surrey History Centre): *Patient Portraits from Surrey Hospitals, 1850–1980*
- **Chris Shepheard**: *Farnham's war caught by the camera? Photographs that avoided the censor*

There will also be a display of Surrey photographs from the archive for attendees to explore.

Event Details

Location: Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 6ND
Date and Time: Saturday 26 April, 9.55am to 4.15pm
Tickets: £18 if booked online via the Surrey Archaeological Society website. £20 on the day (cash only).

Sign up »

VE Day 80 Display

Visit our foyer display from early May to commemorate the **80th anniversary of VE Day**. Featuring photographs, records, and stories from Surrey's VE Day celebrations in **1945, 1995, 2005, 2015**, and **2020**, the display highlights personal memories from those who experienced the historic day.

You can also discover records to help trace family members who served in WWII.

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All the latest news from the Surrey History Centre HERE

Epsom & Ewell athletics legend remembered

7 September 2025



Remembering Don Turner: A Legend in Local Athletics

Epsom and Ewell's athletics community is mourning the loss of **Don Turner**, who passed away on Sunday, 9 March. A dedicated member of **Epsom and Ewell Harriers** for an incredible 70 years, Don was not only an accomplished athlete but also a respected official and administrator who left an indelible mark on the sport, both locally and nationally.

Don's career in athletics was nothing short of remarkable. An international-standard distance runner, he completed 65 marathons, but his true talent shone in even longer races. He broke the world record for a six-hour track run in challenging conditions at Stompond Lane, won the grueling Isle of Man TT course race twice, and was part of a Surrey trio who dominated the 1962 Comrades Marathon in South Africa, finishing within the top four.

His dedication to the sport extended far beyond competing. Don was a pillar of athletics officiating, holding key roles within Epsom and Ewell Harriers, Surrey Athletics, the South of England AA, and South of the Thames Cross Country Association. His expertise in timekeeping was widely recognized, and he became a mentor to many officials in the region.

A true pioneer in race technology, Don played a crucial role in introducing photofinish techniques in an era when timing relied on manual stopwatches and wet film processing. He was a key figure in international athletics, including officiating at the prestigious Crystal Palace events and working with Seiko at the Barcelona Olympics test event in 1991.

Perhaps one of his most well-known contributions was his involvement in the founding of the London Marathon in 1981, working alongside Chris Brasher and John Disley to organize the race's finish and timekeeping. Yet, despite these high-profile roles, Don remained dedicated to grassroots athletics. Well into his 80s, he could be found officiating at local youth competitions, including the Ebbisham League at Ewell Track.

Helen Maguire, MP for Epsom and Ewell and an Epsom and Ewell Harriers runner, paid tribute to Don's immense contribution:

"Don officiated in many a race I've taken part in during my 14 years running for Epsom & Ewell Harriers. Don also helped start the London Marathon alongside Chris Brasher in 1981. He lived in Stoneleigh. His contribution to the sport of running has been enormous and he will not be forgotten. Thanks, Don, for everything you have done for the sport."

A Club with a Rich Heritage

Don Turner's legacy will live on through Epsom and Ewell Harriers, one of the oldest and most successful athletics clubs in Surrey. With a membership of approximately 250 athletes of all ages and abilities, the club competes in a range of track and field, cross country, and road running events at regional, national, and even international levels.

The club's facilities include a six-lane track and provisions for high jump, long jump, pole vault, hammer, discus, and javelin training. It is a strong competitor in the Surrey Cross Country leagues, Area Cross Country Championships, and road running events. Additionally, the club actively supports and encourages coaching and officiating qualifications among its members.

Epsom and Ewell Harriers also play a vital role in the local running community, including their well-established link with Nonsuch parkrun, where they frequently provide volunteer support. As a registered charity (number 1187959), the club continues to promote athletics and nurture future generations of athletes.

Don Turner's passing marks the end of an era for Epsom and Ewell athletics. He will be remembered not just for his achievements and contributions but for his unwavering passion and generosity in supporting the sport at every level. The athletics community will deeply miss him, but his legacy will continue to inspire for years to come.

Image courtesy England Athletics

Geography Squadron celebrates 70 years in Ewell

7 September 2025

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In a ceremony held on Saturday 15th March in **Ewell** the **135 Geographic Squadron Royal Engineers** commemorated their 70th anniversary at **Mercator House** (off Welbeck Close) by unveiling the first Ordnance Survey (OS) benchmark in over 25 years. This event not only celebrates the squadron's longstanding presence in Ewell but also highlights their historic ties with the OS, dating back to 1791.

A Legacy of Geographic Excellence

Established in 1948, the 135 Geographic Squadron has evolved into a pivotal Army Reserve unit, providing comprehensive geographic support to UK Defence operations. Their expertise encompasses surveying, terrain analysis, and the production and distribution of vital geographic materials. Over the years, squadron members have been deployed to various operational theatres, including Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and the Balkans, underscoring their critical role in supporting military operations.

The Significance of Ordnance Survey Benchmarks

Ordnance Survey benchmarks are physical markers that denote height above Ordnance Datum Newlyn, the standard reference point for elevation in mainland Great Britain. Traditionally etched onto enduring structures like buildings or bridges, these benchmarks have been integral to accurate mapping and surveying. However, with advancements in technology, the maintenance of these physical markers has ceased, making the recent installation at Mercator House particularly noteworthy.

Ceremonial Unveiling at Mercator House

The unveiling ceremony featured a parade by current squadron members and veterans, symbolizing the enduring camaraderie and dedication within the unit. Nick Bolton, Director General and CEO of Ordnance Survey, officiated the event, reflecting on the deep-rooted connection between OS and the 135 Geographic Squadron. He remarked, "I am proud to unveil such a permanent monument to the deep connection between Ordnance Survey and 135 Geographic Squadron."

The Officer Commanding 135 Geographic Squadron said: "This has been a fantastic opportunity for the Squadron to mark this significant milestone within the community of Epsom and Ewell. It also recognises the remarkable role OS Reservists played in our Squadron's early years and the deep geographic links that exist with OS today."

A Shared History: OS and Military Collaboration

The relationship between Ordnance Survey and the military is deeply entrenched in history. The OS's origins trace back to the 18th century when Major-General William Roy initiated a detailed survey of the Scottish Highlands, laying the groundwork for modern mapping techniques. This collaboration has persisted through significant historical events, with OS providing essential geospatial data during both World Wars and continuing to support military operations and national resilience efforts in contemporary times.

The establishment of the new benchmark at Mercator House not only honours the squadron's past achievements but also signifies a commitment to ongoing excellence in geographic support. As technological advancements continue to transform mapping and surveying, the enduring partnership between Ordnance Survey and the 135 Geographic Squadron Royal Engineers remains a cornerstone of the UK's defence infrastructure.

This commemorative event serves as a testament to the squadron's dedication and the pivotal role of accurate geographic information in safeguarding the nation.

Image: 135 Survey Engineer Regiment training in the 1950s

Surrey's fire ruined mansion restoration plan

7 September 2025

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Plans to restore an 18th century house have been waved through. The National Trust has now revealed its designs to restore and refurbish Clandon Park House to celebrate the rich history and legacy wrapped around the building.

The Grade I listed home near Guildford was considered an architectural masterpiece when it was built 200 years ago. But Clandon Park House was tragically gutted by an accidental fire in 2015, destroying the roof and leaving most of the interior with blackened and scorched brickwork.

Illustrative designs show the trust's ambitions for Clandon Park House to become a new national treasure and a defining cultural hub, with space for workshops and social events. Guildford Borough Council unanimously approved the plans last week.

Restoring the inside of the mansion house, the scheme will refurbish and replace windows and doors, reinstating the stairs as well as providing a new accessible lift from the basement to the roof. Generous walkways will be carved out in the mansion house and the scheme promises to conserve historic collections, redisplaying them in creative ways.

Alterations to the basement will provide a cafe, toilets and other back of house bits. The project will restore the exterior of the building to appear as it did before it was engulfed by the fire, planning documents state.

Image: The Marble Hall could be used to hold events for the community. (Credit: Allies and Morrison/ National Trust)

Jekyll's Ashtead garden plan can no longer hide

7 September 2025



Recently unearthed plans of an **Ashtead** garden, designed by the renowned Gertrude Jekyll, have been donated to the Surrey History Centre.

Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) of Munstead Wood, Godalming, is celebrated as one of the greatest English garden designers. Though she described herself as an 'artist-gardener,' Jekyll was also a painter, embroiderer, interior designer, author, and photographer. As an early exponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Surrey, her legacy includes significant garden plans, watercolours, photographs, and publications, all held at the Surrey History Centre.

The newly unearthed plans, detailing the garden at Warren Hurst in Ashtead, were thought to be lost but were discovered inside a copy of Richard Bisgrove's book, *The Gardens of Gertrude Jekyll* (1992). They were returned to a former property owner, who brought them to the attention of the Surrey Gardens Trust. The plans have been donated to the Surrey History Centre to enhance its extensive Jekyll collections.

The discovery of these two plans is important. While other plans of Warren Hurst exist in the Gertrude Jekyll Collection at the University of California, Berkeley, and can be accessed through the Surrey Gardens Trust website, these newly found plans offer more detailed evidence of Jekyll's work.

One plan is a tracing made by the house architect, Percy Leeds, to communicate with Jekyll. He wrote notes on it, asking her questions about planting and plant sourcing, and she responded with her own instructions. The other plan is a rough pencil copy of one of Jekyll's detailed herbaceous border designs, given to the architect for reference.

Together, these plans show that the garden project was active in July 1914, just before the First World War began. They capture the creative exchange between Jekyll and the architect as they brought her designs to life. These documents offer a fascinating insight into Jekyll's methods and types of plants and shrubs, confirming that the garden was fully planted.

The Surrey History Centre's Conservator, with funding from the Surrey Gardens Trust, has meticulously conserved the garden plans. The conservation process included surface cleaning, light humidification and flattening to remove creases, and repairing torn or fragile areas using wheat starch paste and Japanese paper. Once conserved, the plans will be mounted on sturdy boards and protected in archival polyester sleeves. The plans will be featured in an exhibition of

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archive treasures at the Surrey History Centre's Open Day on **Saturday 8th March**.

Councillor Denise Turner Stewart, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, said:

"The donation of these plans is a remarkable addition to our collection. Gertrude Jekyll's work continues to inspire and educate, and we are thrilled to preserve and share these historical documents with the public.

The upcoming Open Day on 8th March is a fantastic opportunity for residents and visitors to explore these plans and other fascinating collections. With our friendly and helpful staff, we would like to see as many residents as possible using the Surrey History Centre for research and discovering the fascinating history of the county of Surrey.

Whether you're a history buff or simply curious about our work, the day will offer something for everyone, so do come along and explore our diverse collections."

Sarah Dickinson, Chair of Surrey Gardens Trust, added:

"It is a rare moment when lost Gertrude Jekyll plans come to light. These are working drawings, the tools of her trade. They enhance our understanding of Jekyll's garden design practice. They narrate a moment in history, the Summer of 1914, when a Jekyll design and its planting is being implemented.

We are transported to Jekyll's desk and witness her tenacity as she responds to questions from the architect who is overseeing the planting of this garden. Surrey Gardens Trust is equally thrilled to be part of this revelation and to support the preservation and presentation of these unique documents."

For more information on the **Open Day** and to book a place on a behind-the-scenes tour, please visit the **Surrey History Centre website**.

Discover more about **Gertrude Jekyll sources** at the Surrey History Centre.

Explore **Gertrude Jekyll's Surrey Archive** on the **Surrey Gardens Trust's website** for additional insights.

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