

Should the Epsom Derby go back to Wednesday?

28 May 2024



The first Wednesday of June used to be for many an unofficial bank holiday. Office, retail and factory staff parties filled **Epsom Downs** enjoying a day off and the annual **Epsom Derby** flat-race. The Epsom High Street shops used to close.

Of course, this year the Epsom Derby will take place on Saturday 1st June and the shops will remain very much open.

In a bold statement aimed at reviving the charm and prominence of the Epsom Derby, retired jockey **Dane O'Neill** has suggested returning the event to its traditional Wednesday slot. This proposal comes in light of apparent declining attendances and the Derby's diminishing distinctiveness against competitors like Royal Ascot.

O'Neill was speaking to Boyle Sports, who offer the latest odds for the Epsom Derby event, said "I think they have messed things up by moving it around a lot, and as a result has lost its identity for the wider public. We have seen it under several different guises. For the aficionado it is always going to be the Epsom Derby, one of the mainstays of English racing, but they have changed it so much that it has lost its spark."

For much of the 20th century, the Epsom Derby was synonymous with the first Wednesday in June. This midweek scheduling created a unique atmosphere, drawing massive crowds not only for the race but also for a festive day out. Historically, even Parliament would adjourn to allow members to attend, highlighting the event's national significance.

However, in 1995, the race was moved to Saturday in a bid to boost attendances and television ratings, a decision that has since been met with mixed reactions.

The switch to Saturday was intended to increase visibility and attendance, capitalizing on the weekend's leisure time. Yet, O'Neill and other critics argue that this move has diluted the Derby's unique character, making it just another event in a crowded sporting calendar. O'Neill believes that returning to a Wednesday would help restore the Derby's distinctiveness and might reignite public interest by creating a midweek spectacle that stands out on its own.

Epsom's course is renowned for its challenging nature, likened by O'Neill to a rollercoaster ride with its steep climbs and sharp turns, particularly at Tattenham Corner. This distinctive track demands exceptional skill from both horse and jockey, adding to the race's allure and prestige.

The Derby remains a cornerstone of English flat racing, celebrated for its history and the high calibre of competition it attracts.

Do you have a view? Write to our letters page.

Images credit: @EpsomRacecourse

D-Day celebration on Epsom Downs

28 May 2024



A special event to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day Landings is taking place on Epsom Downs on Thursday 6 June, 7-9.30pm. The event is being jointly run by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council, Go Epsom and Epsom Downs Racecourse.

The D-Day Landings are recognised as the largest naval, air and land operation in history, with more than 150,000 troops landing on five beaches in Normandy and bringing about the liberation of north-west Europe from Nazi occupation. Commemorative events are taking place nationally to remember those who gave their lives during the D-Day Landings.

The public are invited to come down to the Racecourse from 7pm, when the grandstand will open. Refreshments and fish and chips will be on sale, and there will be a range of entertainment on offer. The event is free to attend.

At 9pm, a ceremony will take place at the beacon on Epsom Downs, including a lone piper playing, and at 9.15pm the

beacon will be lit. The beacon lighting is part of a national chain of beacons being lit across the country, and along the Normandy coast of France, and is designed to represent the 'light of peace' that emerged out of the darkness of war.

Cllr **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee at the council, said:

"The beacon lighting event is an opportunity for the community to come together to honour the thousands of people involved in the D-Day landings. Their brave actions enable us all to enjoy the peace and freedom we have today.

"We look forward to welcoming residents and visitors to this special and important event."

Karen Pengelly, BID Manager at Go Epsom, said:

"Epsom's beacon was erected two years ago to mark the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty the Queen. It is an absolute honour to be involved in the D-Day 80th commemoration. Epsom, just like many other places, played an active part in World War 2; this is our chance to remember the sacrifices made by so many."

Tom Sammes, General Manager at Epsom Downs Racecourse, said:

"We are honoured and delighted to be a part of the D-Day 80th commemoration. The racecourse was a key part of Epsom's World War 2 response and we look forward to welcoming the community to remember the brave personnel who risked their lives for freedom and peace."

Background image credit Expert Infantry CC BY 2.0 DEED

Surrey's corpse railway and death in Victorian times

28 May 2024



The Victorians treated death very differently to people today and would photograph their deceased alongside living members of their family, take locks of hair from the departed and seal it in jewellery, (which they would wear) display bronze figures of dead animals in their homes and make plaster death masks from the faces of the dead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Family-friendly events to be held across Surrey include:

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

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

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



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

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

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

<https://victorianmemorials.wordpress.com>

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

Antiques Roadshow’s poor sign of value?

28 May 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

If nothing else, my miniature, bronze Javanese wild boar figure has become a conversation piece that has enabled me to write this article about who to contact when real Roman artifacts are dug up in a garden.

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

The Portable Antiquities Scheme website and database can be accessed through the British Museum's website at www.finds.org.uk.

Related Reports:

[Urning a big profit on rare Epsom find](#)

The Great Escape - New Unpublished Evidence

28 May 2024



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



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

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

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

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

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



John inside a WW2 aircraft

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



John’s girlfriend

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There had been quite a lot of snow and a white Christmas was anticipated, but despite only being early November, John wished his girlfriend a happy Christmas in case she did not get to hear for him for a while.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



John and his MG sports car

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



John’s final resting place

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Top photo: John in his MG sports car.

Spitfire downed Messerschmitt over Epsom

28 May 2024



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

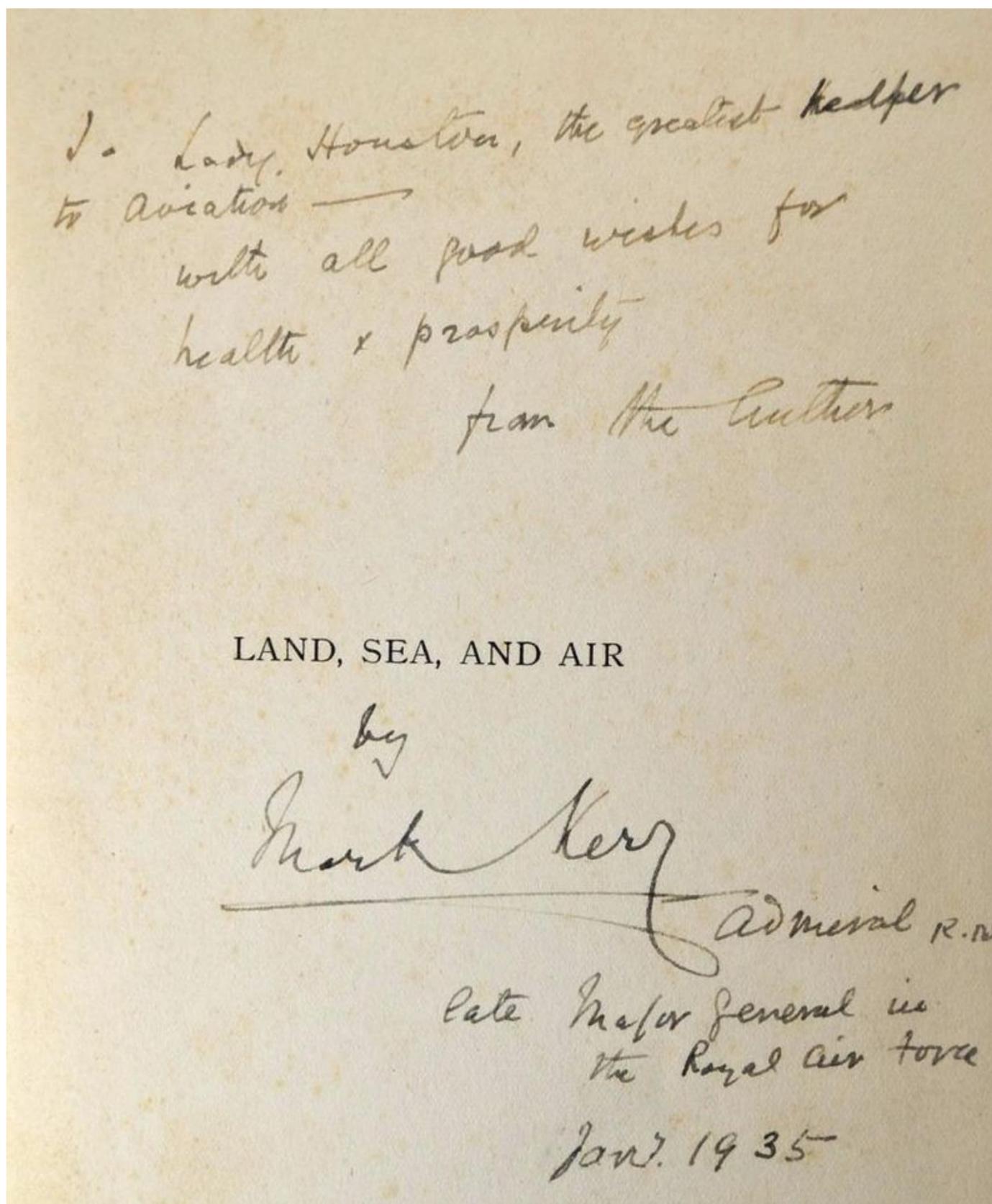
"WW2 People's War" is an archive of World War 2 memories that have been documented by the public and gathered by the BBC.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Ada of Surrey inspires big AI project

28 May 2024



Drawing inspiration from **Ada Lovelace**, who resided in Surrey, a computing pioneer and translator who overcame societal barriers in the 19th century, the "ADA network" based at **Surrey University** aims to usher in a transformative era of AI research focused on digital inclusion.

Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace (*née* **Byron**; 10 December 1815 - 27 November 1852) was an English mathematician and writer, chiefly known for her work on Charles Babbage's proposed mechanical general-purpose computer, the Analytical Engine. She was the first to recognise that the machine had applications beyond pure calculation. In 1835, she married the first Earl of Lovelace, becoming Lady King. They had a home in Ockham Park, Surrey.

The **University of Surrey** has been granted a multi-million-pound award from the **Leverhulme Trust** to spearhead a groundbreaking initiative aimed at ensuring equitable access to artificial intelligence (AI)-powered digital media. This ambitious project, named the Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Network for AI-Enabled Digital Accessibility (**ADA**), will receive a grant of £2.15 million over eight years.

Professor **Sabine Braun**, ADA Director at the University of Surrey, emphasized the importance of digital media accessibility, stating that it is pivotal for engaging with various aspects of life, from public information to entertainment. The ADA project aims to leverage AI technology to make digital content accessible to individuals of all ages, languages, cognitive and sensory abilities, and physical mobility.

In today's digital landscape, interacting with digital content involves complex sensory inputs. However, accessibility issues arise when individuals cannot access content in their preferred language or format. While traditional methods like text subtitles or simplified versions have been used to address these challenges, the sheer volume of digital content necessitates AI-driven solutions.

The ADA project seeks to advance AI-driven accessibility solutions by integrating insights from the humanities and social sciences to better understand user needs.

The Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI (PAI) will host the ADA project, aligning with its mission to advance AI from a human-centric perspective. The project will draw expertise from three renowned research centers at the University of Surrey: the Centre for Translation Studies (CTS), the Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing (CVSSP), and the Nature Inspired Computer and Engineering Research Group (NICE).

CTS will contribute expertise in language and translation technology to improve media accessibility, while CVSSP will leverage its world-leading AI and computer vision capabilities. NICE will provide specific expertise in knowledge-driven AI and machine translation for under-resourced languages.

Professor **Adrian Hilton**, Director of PAI and CVSSP, highlighted ADA's vision to establish a hub for high-quality research training in AI-enabled digital accessibility. By collaborating with Surrey's Digital World Research Centre (DWRC), Digital Societies, and Brain and Behaviour research groups, the ADA project aims to drive meaningful advancements in AI accessibility, ensuring that media services are accessible and inclusive for all individuals and society.

Image: Daguerreotype by Antoine Claudet and Surrey University's newest lab that has 200 machines which are each equipped with a Nvidia Quadro P4000 Graphics Card: useful for intensive jobs that require multiple cores in areas such as data science, AI and deep learning.

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

28 May 2024



The trustees of the Epsom charity **The Friends of Horton Cemetery** have appealed to the public to sign an **online petition** on **change.org** that calls for Europe's largest asylum cemetery to be returned to the community. In a bizarre decision in 1983 the Epsom five acre resting place of 9000 patients was transferred by the NHS to a property speculator. Norman Fowler was the Conservative Secretary of State for Health at the time. The property speculator was a darling of the privatisation movement having been the first to obtain and "rejuvenate" Council tower-blocks. A former local Councillor serving Epsom and Ewell at the time recalls no efforts to transfer the Cemetery to the Council, despite it being in law the "burial authority".

It has been neglected ever since with no planning application ever being submitted by the owner. Why he holds on to it is a mystery to the trustees of the Charity. According to Lionel Blackman, the Charity's secretary and local solicitor: "Mr Heighes, who owns Marque Securities, has never replied to any of our correspondence seeking a dialogue about the future of the Cemetery. In my opinion only a special Act of Parliament could allow the Cemetery to be used for any purpose other than a Cemetery. Even using it as "amenity woodland" would be a breach of its recognised planning status."

The Charity's volunteers continue to research and publish on the **Charity's website** the lives of those buried in the Cemetery.

Image: Horton Cemetery in 1952. Well maintained like this until sold in 1983

Complementing this work are the initiatives of the Surrey History Centre (SHC):

Glass slides of patients at the Manor Hospital, Epsom

Did you know that SHC holds a sizeable collection of glass plate negatives, yet to be identified, of male and female patients at The Manor Hospital, Epsom.

A project is currently underway to digitise, identify and catalogue the loose negatives of male and female patients in 6317/3/- that date from the 1890s to the 1910s. They are a fascinating and moving portrait of the men and women who were admitted to the Manor Hospital, and a valuable resource for anyone researching individual patients or generally interested in the history of mental health treatment in the late 19th to early 20th century.



The first stage has now been completed, comprising 79 high resolution digital photographs of male patients, and thumbnail images have been added to the online catalogue (6317/3/-), see <http://tinyurl.com/55sasppx>.

As well as identifying the patient name and hospital number, importantly the catalogue entries include a cross-reference to the relevant case book in Surrey History Centre reference 6282/14/-. The case book entries, which provide a detailed account of the patient's illness and treatment, also include a photograph of the patient, and this has enabled us to match and identify the glass negatives.

For the next stage, there is one more box of slides of male patients to complete, and we'll then continue with the larger collection of female patient slides.

For more on the history of Manor Hospital, see the Exploring Surrey's Past website.

Was your ancestor in an asylum? This talk traces the history of the care of people living with mental illness or learning disability from the 18th century through to the 1990s. Using the records of Surrey's earliest private asylums, county institutions at Springfield, Brookwood and Netherne, charitable foundations like Royal Earlswood and Holloway Sanatorium and the 'Epsom Cluster' of Horton, Long Grove, The Manor, St Ebba's and West Park, it traces the history of mental health care in Surrey, and uses medical records to uncover the hidden stories of individual patients, including some from Hampshire. It draws on photographs and other records rescued when these vast hospitals finally closed to explore daily life in a psychiatric institution over the course of three centuries.

Tracing the History and Experiences of Our Asylum Ancestors, 1700-c1990

26 February 2024, 6pm to 7pm Online

A talk by Julian Pooley for Hampshire Archives & Local Studies

This talk will take place online, 6.00 to 7.00pm Tickets £6.00. For further information and to book visit: Hampshire County Council (hants.gov.uk)

A blast celebrates 40 years past of Epsom Playhouse

28 May 2024



On Friday 19th January, the Band of the **Coldstream Guards** joined residents of Epsom to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the **Epsom Playhouse**.

Led by Director of music Lieutenant Colonel **Stewart Halliday**, the band performed an eclectic mix of music ranging from classic marches to hits from the West End.

As expected the band played with military precision, and there were some virtuous solos from all sections including a stunning performance of 'Victors Tale' from the film 'The Terminal' by principal clarinettist Lance Sergeant **Natalie White**.

The audience was delighted to see the concert organiser and former Senior Director of Music, Household Division, Cllr Dr **Graham Jones** MBE (RA Cuddington) pick up his baton once again to conduct the band, and encouraged the audience to participate in the encore in the 'Radetzky March' by Johann Strauss.

This concert has raised awareness and funds for the Epsom & Ewell Royal British Legion and the Epsom & Ewell Mayor's Charities. With all programme sales being match funded by Barclays Bank.

We hope this will be the start of more world class bands coming to perform at Epsom Playhouse.

The Epsom and Ewell Times is proud to have supported the concert.

Claudia Jones - Reporter

Image courtesy Steven McCormick Photography

Lionel Blackman, who was in the original staff team of the Playhouse when it opened 40 years ago, writes:

40 years have passed since the Epsom Playhouse first opened its doors to professional and amateur performers alike. The Council head-hunted **Graham Stansfield**, a great professional, to kick-start the programme and establish the venue. The first management was in the hands of a then young and dynamic **Robin Hodgkinson**. The theatre came with the development of the **Ashley Centre** by the **Bechtel Corporation**. Originally the main hall's retractable seating allowed the venue to host balls and exhibitions. Today it has fixed and comfortable seating for 406 and a smaller flexible hall space, The Myers, with a seating capacity of 80.

From those early years onward Epsom Playhouse attracted many high-class acts: The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the bands of Humphrey Lyttleton, Kenny Ball and James Last. The Pasadena Roof Orchestra and the Instant Sunshine entertainers came regularly. The world famous Stepan Grappelli once cast his magic violin over a sell-out audience and many many more through to today. Many of the UK's top comedians will spend an evening in Epsom when on tour: Jack Dee, Count Arthur Strong, Harry Hill and many others. It remains the venue for the annual and very popular Christmas Pantomime.

The venue is the permanent home of local amateur talent the Epsom Symphony Orchestra and The Epsom Players among others.

The **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council** and all local residents who support the venue can be proud of The Epsom Playhouse and its 40 year roll-call of talent, opportunity and entertainment.

Why not give up an evening of Netflix or YouTube and see some live entertainment at your local venue? Visit www.epsomplayhouse.co.uk

Grate find in Epsom's Millennium Green

28 May 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

info@woodcotemillenniumgreen.org.uk

The Wisdom of Epsom

28 May 2024



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The photographs with this article include images of a London Palladium pantomime programme dated 1960 which I purchased from the Princess Alice Hospice charity shop in Church Street in Epsom shortly after an elderly Norman had

been moved out of his flat off of Church Street by family members for care purposes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surrey women who stood for Parliament 1918

28 May 2024



On 14th December 1918 women across the country turned out in their thousands to first vote in a General Election. In some areas they outnumbered men voters by 20 to 1.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 had been passed in February 1918, and widened the parliamentary electorate to women over the age of 30 (but still required a minimum property qualification).

Men over the age of 21, including the millions of soldiers returning from the First World War, were also able to vote for the first time. Due to wartime casualties women outnumbered men in the population as a whole, and under the new provision women would make up around 43% of the electorate. However, imposing a higher age qualification for women ensured that they did not become the majority in the electorate.

Whilst universal franchise for women would take another 10 years, the passing of this Act forever changed the established way that political parties campaigned and canvassed during elections.

Find out how Surrey women responded to their newly won voting rights with our Exploring Surrey's Past web page <https://bit.ly/2pqRC3c>.



The Emily Davison Memorial Statue in the Market Square Epsom. A suffragette who died in Epsom after a protest at the Derby for women's voting rights.

Top image: All three Surrey women fought for seats in the 1918 General Election but were unsuccessful. Credits: Postcard showing 'Mrs Despard, President, The Women's Freedom League (SHC ref 10065/1) Postcard of Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, 'Joint Editor of "Votes for Women" - Honorary Treasurer National Women's Social and Political Union. 4 Clement's Inn, W.C.' (SHC ref 10065/2; this postcard was originally from an album compiled by Women's Freedom League members, Edith, Florence and Grace Hodgson). Norah Dacre Fox in her youth.

Surrey History Centre

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

Bonkers about bunkers in Epsom

28 May 2024



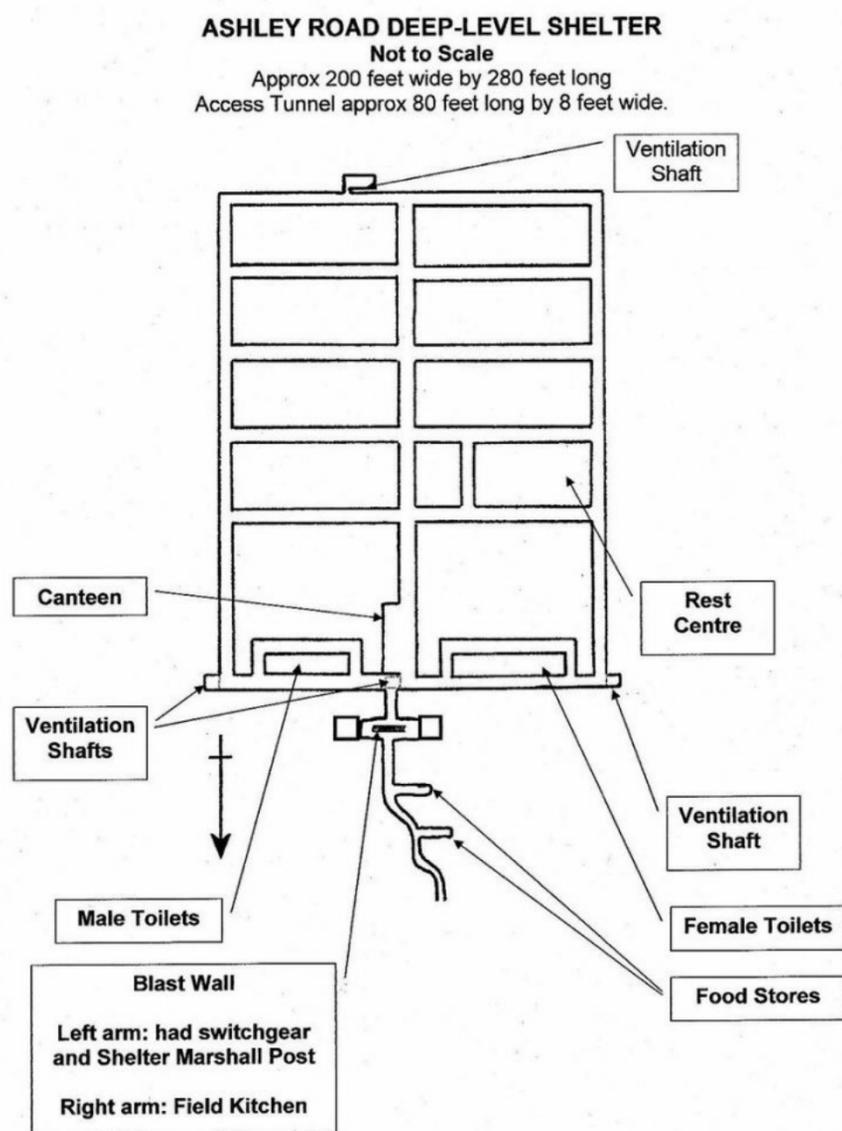
The Epsom and Ewell Times joined a group of bunker-busters to explore the little known World War 2 underground complex.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Veteran lives celebrated at Epsom's Comrades Club

28 May 2024



With funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, Surrey County Council has captured the life stories of four veterans and presented the booklets to them and their families in a special ceremony at **The Comrades Club, Epsom** in The Parade, Epsom

Part of the Force for Change project, the funding provided was to identify former service personnel living in Surrey who were not already known to the council, document their life stories and look at how veterans can be further supported.

The project focused on three areas of Surrey – Epsom & Ewell, Guildford and Surrey Heath. Activities organised to engage veterans included canal boat trips, basketball sessions, outdoors and indoor archery, fire skills and model-making sessions.

Alongside this, newly trained volunteers from **Bourne Hall museum in Ewell**, supported by trained staff from the Surrey History Centre worked with the veterans to document and record their life stories. The booklets created will be stored in the Surrey History Centre for future generations, and copies have been presented to the veterans and their families.

Chair of the Council, Saj Hussain is the Armed Forces Champion for Surrey County Council. He said: *“Preserving the life stories of our veterans is not just a responsibility; it’s a tribute to their sacrifices. Through the Force for Change project, we’ve had the privilege of documenting and sharing these remarkable journeys. These booklets serve as a testament to their dedication and resilience, ensuring that their legacy lives on for future generations and their families to learn from and be inspired by.”*

Councillor Kevin Deanus, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue, and Resilience, said: *“Time is running out for us to capture these important stories and ensure they are documented for future generations. We are delighted to have been able to support this project, to be able to connect with and provide support for more veterans in Surrey.”*

One of the volunteers, Phil Read, documented Tegwyn Bryn Lloyd’s story. Sadly, Tegwyn passed away last year shortly after completing his life story. **Phil said:** *“He [Tegwyn] came across as a very gentle soul to me, God fearing and that. Very gentle but yet did his duty and that overrode everything else and that came across to me more than anything.”*

Throughout the project veterans were connected to the veteran hubs across Surrey for ongoing social activities and support.

If you or a family member is serving, has served, or if you support members of the Armed Forces community, you can download the free Forces Connect app from Apple or Google stores. The app signposts to a wide range of support services.

Latest news from Surrey History Centre

28 May 2024



UK Disability History Month runs from 16 November to 16 December and aims to promote disabled people’s rights and their struggle for equality now and in the past.

This year’s theme is Disability, Children and Youth and to coincide with this **Surrey History Centre** (SHC) has announced a collaboration with Professor **Jane Hamlett** from Royal Holloway, University of London’s History Department working on a project to uncover and share the histories of children at schools for the deaf and blind.

From the early twentieth century some of the leading residential schools for the deaf and blind were based in Surrey,

including the Royal School for the Blind, Nutfield Priory and Burwood School. When the schools closed in the 1980s and 1990s their records were accessioned by SHC.

The research team will carry out a new archival survey of this material, uncovering historical experience from the archives. The project aims to use participatory research to create a new historical narrative about these children's lives, through collaboration with charities who work with young people with learning disabilities. The research will be used to inform a new guide to history of disability on SHC's website Exploring Surrey's Past and a new audio resource that will narrate stories from the archives.

See more news and events from The Surrey History Centre [HERE](#)

Local historian Peter Reed will be missed

28 May 2024



In Loving Memory of **Peter Reed** (23/08/52 - 19/10/23). Peter Reed passed away on October 19, 2023, leaving a void in the hearts of many. Born and raised in Epsom and Ewell to James and Evelyn Reed, Peter's journey was defined by his unwavering dedication to his family and his profound impact on the community.

A man of generous spirit and unwavering kindness, Peter's life reflected a passion for understanding the inner workings of the world around him. From an early age, his curiosity led him to disassemble toys, cultivating an interest in creation, particularly in woodworking and exploring historical contexts. His inquisitiveness matured into a fascination with the evolution of technology, particularly in the realm of computers and their historical significance. His career path led him to utilize his technical acumen at the Inland Revenue, Lambeth Council, and a London medical center, where he not only honed his skills but also used his expertise to benefit various charitable causes.

Peter's profound love for history propelled him to join the **Epsom and Ewell History Centre** at Bourne Hall in 2005. There, he spearheaded the creation of the website and served as the dedicated webmaster for the Epsom and Ewell History Explorer. His commitment extended beyond mere content creation; he tirelessly assisted countless individuals, locally and internationally, with historical inquiries, demonstrating his wealth of knowledge and willingness to help others.

Recognized as the driving force behind the History Explorer website, Peter's collaborative efforts with local experts and his encyclopedic knowledge of the area facilitated an invaluable resource for researchers and history enthusiasts. His significant contributions were felt and appreciated by numerous individuals and organizations, symbolizing his profound impact on the preservation and promotion of local history.

While Peter leaves behind no immediate family of his own, he leaves a lasting legacy in the hearts of his sister, nieces, and a community that deeply appreciated his dedication and expertise. His loss is deeply felt, but his remarkable contributions to the Epsom and Ewell community will forever be remembered and cherished.

Peter Reed's passion, dedication, and selfless commitment to preserving local history have left an indelible mark. His legacy lives on in the continued work of those he inspired, ensuring that the Epsom and Ewell History Explorer remains a testament to his invaluable contributions to local heritage. He will be greatly missed, but his impact will resonate through the cherished memories and the enduring legacy he leaves behind.

Image: Peter Reed with his local history "angels".