



Ada of Surrey inspires big AI project

7 February 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

7 February 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.

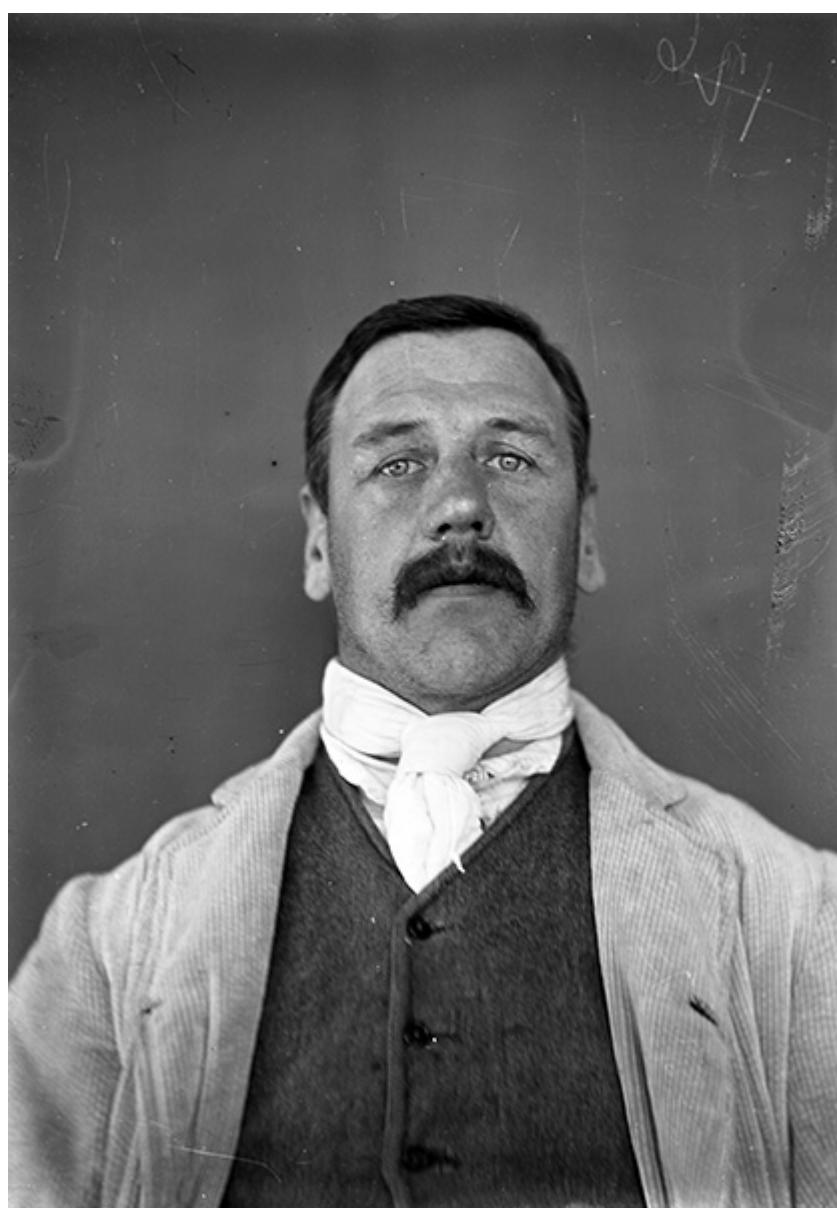
Image: Horton Cemetery in 1952. Well maintained like this until sold in 1983

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

7 February 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 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

7 February 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 Northe (1652-1723) in the late 17th Century and became the family seat to the Northe 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 Ernest 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

7 February 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

7 February 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

7 February 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.

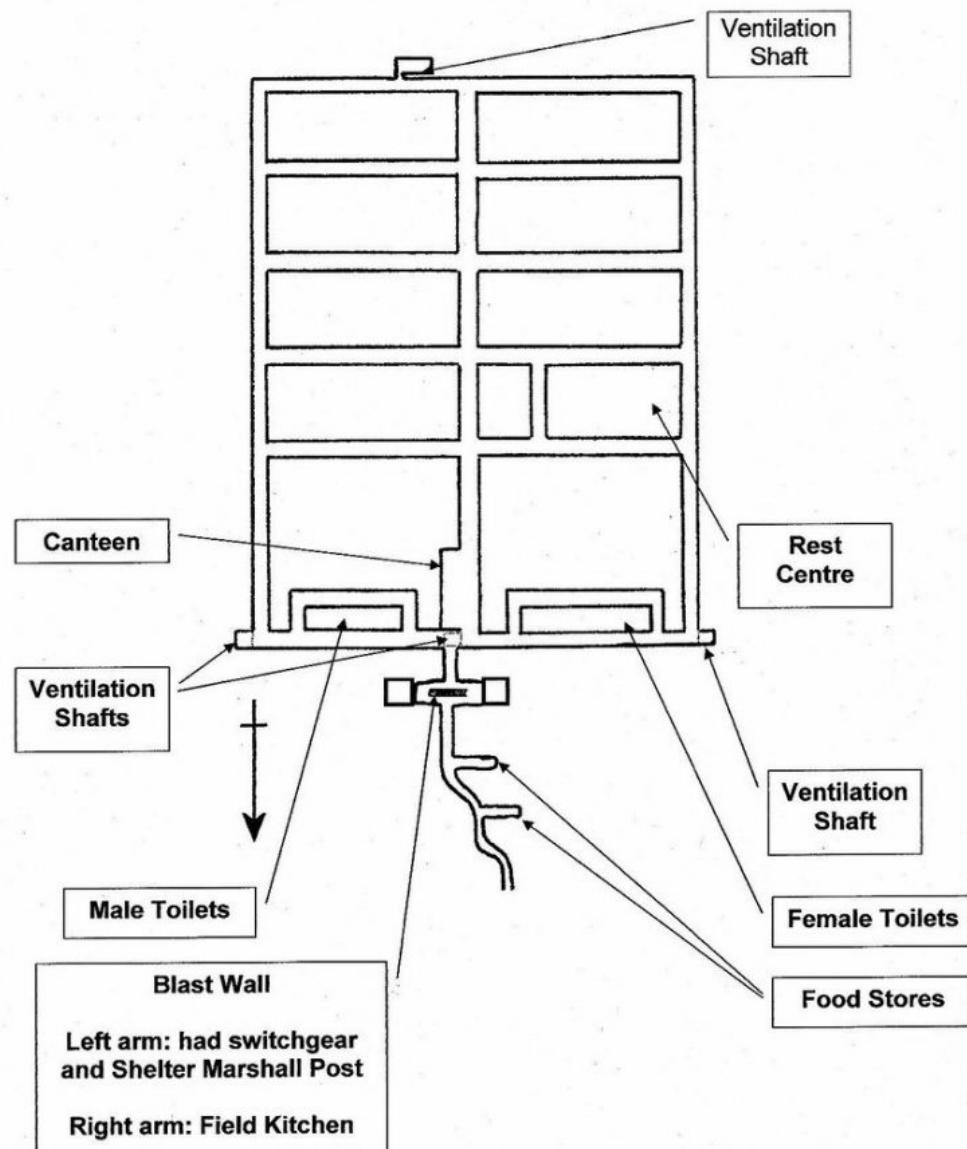
According to The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer, in 1942 people entering the development were advised to bring wraps or thick overcoats and lighting was by 12V bulkhead filament fittings served by metal conduited electric cables. The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer also states that 40 stand-by paraffin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



ASHLEY ROAD DEEP-LEVEL SHELTER

Not to Scale

Approx 200 feet wide by 280 feet long
Access Tunnel approx 80 feet long by 8 feet wide.



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

7 February 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.

