

## Epsom's Erotica By Candlelight

25 October 2023



A pale and slender man, suffering from ill health, began drawing an image by candlelight inside a room in Epsom's Spread Eagle Hotel in June 1896 probably knowing he was nearing the end of his life.

A year earlier the same man's career had taken a dramatic turn for the worse when he was sacked from his job through no fault of his own and now, he found himself alone, poverty stricken and shunned as a consequence of Oscar Wilde, the poet and playwright being arrested and charged with gross indecency.

With one lung barely functioning and the other becoming affected, (as determined by an Epsom doctor) the well-dressed dandy who liked to wear dove-grey suits, hats, ties and yellow gloves continued to create ink drawings inside his two rooms at The Spread Eagle Hotel in Epsom, albeit for a much-reduced client base.



Aubrey Beardsley

The frail man who had booked himself into The Spread Eagle Hotel was the artist, Aubrey Beardsley, but this was not his first visit to Epsom, as he had previously spent two of his difficult childhood years living in lodgings in Ashley Road, a short distance from where The University of the Creative Arts campus is today. Sadly, Aubrey had contracted tuberculosis as a young boy, but could take long walks on the Downs in the fresh air with his mother and sister, Mabel as recommended by his doctors.

Now, thirteen years later, Aubrey Beardsley had returned to Epsom on the advice of his doctors to breathe the town's better air whilst walking on the Downs which he did for the duration of his visit, although such walks were becoming increasingly difficult to undertake.





*Illustration by Beardsley for Oscar Wilde's Salome*

Whilst Aubrey's second stay in Epsom only lasted a few weeks, he managed to complete eight illustrations in The Spread Eagle Hotel for a proposed privately printed edition of the ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes which could be sold expensively to connoisseurs by his publisher. The *Lysistrata* drawings are sexually explicit and these illustrations together with his drawings for Oscar Wilde's disturbing drama *Salome* (the play premiered in Paris in 1896) are among Aubrey's most famous.

According to Wikipedia, Aubrey Beardsley was "the most controversial artist of the Art Nouveau era" who was "renowned for his dark and perverse images and grotesque erotica, which were the main themes of his later work".

Wikipedia goes on to add that Aubrey "satirized Victorian values regarding sex, that at the time highly valued respectability", so it is not surprising that he chose to hide himself away in The Spread Eagle Hotel in the aftermath of the now outdated scandal involving Oscar Wilde and his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas which led to anyone associated with Oscar Wilde being suspected of sodomy.

Despite the sexual nature of his imagery, there is no evidence to suggest that Aubrey had sexual relations with anyone regardless of their sexual orientation, although the precise nature of his relationship with his sister, Mabel (who he drew naked in an illustration which also included his client Oscar Wilde and a goat-legged faun) will undoubtedly continue to form the topic of discussion amongst historians and art critics.

Upon departing Epsom where he had completed some of his best works, Aubrey Beardsley continued to suffer from declining health leading to him having a violent haemorrhage in December 1896 and moving to the French Riviera in April 1897 in an attempt to prolong his life.

Sadly, Aubrey's days were numbered and it was whilst he was on his death bed in the French Riviera that Aubrey wrote to his publisher pleading with him to destroy the illustrations he had drawn in Epsom at The Spread Eagle Hotel. The publisher sent a telegraph to Aubrey telling him his dying wish had been granted, but the truth is the publisher lied and kept the illustrations for his own financial gain - an act that perhaps we should forgive him for selfishly carrying out.

Aubrey Beardsley died of tuberculosis in the early hours of 16 March 1898 in the presence of his mother and sister.

Aubrey may only have been 25 years old at the time of his death, but despite his young age, according to The Guardian Newspaper, "he put sexuality at the centre of modern art for the first time" and spread "his influence across Europe - to Vienna, Paris and Barcelona - 25 years before surrealism".

As the erotic ink drawings of the pale and slender young man which influenced world famous artists such as Picasso, Schiele and Klimt remain extremely important today, let us hope that in the near future a new plaque with the name "Aubrey Beardsley" prominently displayed on it will be attached to the front of The Spread Eagle (the existing plaque makes no mention of Aubrey) to remind everyone of the talented artist who came to Epsom to draw some of his most thought provoking and imaginative illustrations long before there was any acceptance of fluid sexualities and total freedom of expression.



The Spread Eagle in Epsom High Street is perhaps more significant than many people realise as a result of Aubrey Beardsley staying there and drawing erotica by candlelight.

## Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

25 October 2023



On **World Mental Health Day** 10th October on a working and un-seasonally hot day, young and old gathered in commemoration of the 9000 patients buried in Epsom's abandoned Cemetery.

The events were the climax to a year long project of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, supported by **Kings College** and **Dr Alana Harris**, local resident and Reader in History at the University. Entitled "Out of Sight, Out of Mind", the project raised awareness throughout the Borough of the lives of 9000 patients buried between 1899 and 1955. In their memory nearly 1600 ceramic flowers were uniquely painted by hundreds of concerned citizens as they contemplated the stories and photographs of individual patients.



Hardy poem reading





Faith leaders read a committal together

The celebration started in a private field provided for the day by local farmer Mr Seymour Bourne and located right next to the five acre Cemetery. The largest asylum cemetery in Europe. Under a blazing Autumn sun the gathering was addressed by the charity's secretary **Mr Lionel Blackman**, who called for a rejection of a local council categorisation of the Cemetery as "amenity woodland". The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Cllr Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) spoke of Epsom's historic connection to the five psychiatric hospitals in the Borough.

Patron of the charity, **Chris Grayling** MP sent a message, read by Horton Ward Cllr **Kieran Persand**: *"It's easy not to realise, as you drive past, the piece of history that lies behind the fence. Thousands of people lived in the old hospitals, lived and died mostly anonymously. They have no gravestones to mark their final resting place. And disgracefully the cemetery has been allowed to rot by its current owners. It is a credit to the work of the **Friends**, and of people like **Alan Carlson** who raised the money for a memorial, that their memory has not been lost. I hope one day that the cemetery can be taken back, and turned into a real garden of remembrance for those who passed so much of their lives here."*

**Theresa Keneflick**, a trustee of the charity and head of St Josephs Primary School spoke and brought a school choir who sang "True Colours" by Cindy Lauper.

The following each read a verse from Thomas Hardy's 'Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard':

**Rosie Spence**, relative, on behalf of her great, great, great grandfather. **Allen Price** from Love Me Love My Mind. **Carmen Nel**, NHS Clinical Practitioner. **Audrey Ardern-Jones**, local poet and project volunteer. **Charles Wood**, former Nurse at Manor Hospital and Horton Hospital. Kevin McDonnell, Friends of Horton Cemetery Trustee and lead researcher of the lives. **Timothy Folkard**, project volunteer.

Then voices from the Cemetery were spoken by **Epsom Players** representing the lives of Enid Barnet and Richard Waterer.

Dr Alana Harris explained the symbolism of the ribbons everyone had tied for the day to the fence near the Cemetery.

Rev Nick Parish and Judith Mitchell (St Martin's Church of England); Fr Stephen O'Brien (St Joseph's Catholic Church); Pastor Josh Selfe (Epsom Methodist Church); Clerk Frances Touch (Epsom Quakers) said in unison:

"We are gathered to remember these 9000 souls who lived and died in Epsom - to remember them and to make representations that they might have dignity and rest in their death.

To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose on earth. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up.

We affirm our mutual commitment to honour the residents of Horton Cemetery and to work for their memorialisation. Amen."

Finally a trumpet solo 'Marking the Unmarked' - was performed by its composer **Erin Symonds**.

The gathering then followed Scots Piper **Bob Ash** to the former Horton Chapel where a Memorial Garden of the ceramic flowers was unveiled. The audience was addressed by Patron of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, **Baroness Sheila Hollins**, who once worked in the St Ebbas Hospital in Hook Road, Epsom. Dr Harris concluded speeches with an overview of the project and its significance and meaning.

'In Memoriam' a film created by Cameron Cook, Jack Daly and Mica Schlosser of Kings College simply rolled the 9000 names to suitable music. The audience was spellbound.

Company Concentric performed a dance 'Garden Unlocked' and led the audience to the Memorial Garden unveiling. This involved the planting of final flowers within the Forget Me Not installation by **Sue Littleboy** planting for James Poppelwell (great grandad, 1867-1914, d.Long Grove, grave b977); **Nari Fairbanks** (by proxy as resident in NT, Australia) - planting for Charles Holdgate (great, great, great uncle, 1854-1932, d. Long Grove, grave 1105a); **Iveta Goddard** - creator of the ceramic flowers used in the memorial garden and **Lauren** of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

Joining the 200-odd strong audience beside Horton Cemetery were Liberal Democrat PPC **Helen Maguire**, Chair of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party **Mark Todd** and **Gina Miller** the True and Fair Party PPC for the constituency. And as ever on her push-bike, Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) and **Janice Baker** a leader of the local Green Party. Two Residents Association Councillors appeared including Cllr Phil Neale (Cuddington Ward) and another.

## From "Princess" to Pauper's grave in Epsom

25 October 2023



9000 patients of Epsom’s cluster of now closed psychiatric hospitals were buried between 1899 and 1955 in a now abandoned Cemetery. The Friends of Horton Cemetery are writing their life stories and seeking to reclaim the five neglected acres from a property speculator.

The **Horton Cemetery** is located between Horton Lane and Hook Road, **Epsom**.

On **10th October 2023** from 1.00pm The **Mayor Cllr Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) and Mayoress of **Epsom and Ewell** will lead councillors, Aldermen of the Borough and the public in commemorating the lives of the 9000. The commemoration will begin beside the Horton Cemetery. Parking is open in the Hook Road Arena. Ceremonies will start at 1.00pm so the public is advised to park no later than 12.45 to allow time for the walk.

If you intend to attend the event you are requested to complete this simple online RSVP form.

If you are attending you should read the advice of The Friends of Horton Cemetery on the ground conditions and lengths of walks involved. Click [HERE](#).

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Here is a taster of just one of the hundreds of life stories written by the volunteer team of the Friends of Horton Cemetery charity. **Steve Johnson**, one of the research team leaders, delved into the extraordinary story of a Polish aristocrat who’s family’s lives were upturned in the Russian Revolution of 1917.

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**Felicja Staszewicz**, daughter of Aleksander Skirmunt and Teofila Skirmunt (née Lubańska) was born c1873 – the seventh of nine children – at the family country estate of Porzecza, Piński (now Belarus), the family having retained its Polish heritage despite the partition of Poland in 1795.

At the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Felicja and Piotr, together with their family, moved to Vilnius where they remained until the end of WW1. Tragically, Marta-Karolina committed suicide at the outbreak of the revolution.

It is unclear where Felicja and Piotr moved to after WW1, but Piotr died in 1929, and by 1939 we find Felicja living in Teklinopol (her country estate near Vilnius which she had inherited from her mother) with her youngest daughter, Matylda, who had moved there in 1923 after her marriage to Jan Myśliński (also from a notable family that traces back to 1670).

On the 17th September 1939 the Russian army crossed the border and Felicja and Matylda, together with her two young daughters, Janina and Jolanta, were forced out of their home and moved to the nearby village of Wilejka.

On the 13th April 1940, in the middle of the night, the family were arrested and, together with thousands of others, taken by cattle train into Russia as slave labour. Two of Felicja’s sons, Aleksander and Jan Leon were taken by the Russians and were amongst the mass murder of thousands massacred in the forests of Katyń.

Read the full story [HERE](#) on [www.hortoncemetery.org](http://www.hortoncemetery.org)

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## Ewell History Day returns to Bourne Hall

25 October 2023



**Bourne Hall** in **Ewell** is hosting a celebration of local history on Saturday 16 September. Ewell History Day will take visitors on a journey from the Bronze Age up to World War II.

The public will be able to see blacksmith **Dr James Dilly** cast a bronze axe head, watch as Iron Age folk make offerings to their gods in Bourne Hall lake, witness a gladiator fight, meet Henry VIII, try their hands at some brass rubbing, learn about the Ewell witch and listen to wartime stories from the Hampshire Regiment.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, Chair of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s Community and Wellbeing Committee, said, “Last year’s Ewell History Day was sadly cancelled following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, so I am pleased to see it return this year.

“What better way to learn about the interesting and varied history of this area, than to see it come to life before your eyes? It’s sure to be a fun day out for all the family.”

The Programme:



10am	Opens to the public
10.30am	Romans march down Ewell Village from the Grove to Bourne Hall
11am	Mayor opens History Day. Iron Age folk throw gifts in the lake
11.30am	Witchhunter tells the true story of Joan Butts - the Ewell witch
12pm	Fight to the death between a local Iron Age warrior and gladiator
12.30pm	Bronze Age metal smelting
1pm	An audience with Henry VIII
2pm	Children learn a Roman Army drill
2.30pm	Witchhunter tells the true story of Joan Butts - the Ewell witch
3pm	Bronze Age metal smelting
3.30pm	Children learn a Roman Army drill
4pm	An audience with Henry VIII
4.30pm	Fight to the death between a local Iron Age warrior and gladiator
5pm	Finish

Ewell History Day runs from 10am to 5pm, and entry is free.  
The Flying Saucer Café will be open for refreshments.

## Healthy future for Epsom’s restored White House

25 October 2023



The **White House**, located at 16 Waterloo Road, **Epsom**, nestled between Blacks Burgers and Nandos, is a Grade II listed building that dates back to the early 1700s. Recently, it has undergone a beautiful restoration in preparation for an exciting new phase in its rich history.





The new owner has successfully preserved the building's charm and character, while modernizing its internal features to create comfortable and contemporary treatment and therapy spaces. The White House is transformed into a Health and Wellness Centre, where professionals with various skills can utilize rooms once occupied by two historically significant individuals, as confirmed by the plaque on the building's front, visible from the pathway.

Around 1800, Prince George and Mrs. Fitzherbert resided in the same building now known as The White House. However, the question arises: What became of Princess Caroline, the woman Prince George married just five years earlier, and why is her name absent from the plaque?

While King George III led a scandal-free life, the same cannot be said for his son, Prince George, who lived an extravagant lifestyle characterized by heavy drinking and entertaining mistresses. Burdened by mounting debts, Prince George sought financial assistance from his father, who agreed to help him under the condition that Prince George marry his cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick.





Although Prince George had previously secretly married the twice-widowed Maria Anne Fitzherbert, this marriage was invalid because King George III had not consented to it. On April 8, 1795, Prince George married Princess Caroline at the Chapel Royal, St. James's Palace. However, the couple proved incompatible despite Caroline giving birth to Princess Charlotte, George's only legitimate child, just nine months after their wedding ceremony.

Upon their first meeting, Prince George called for a glass of brandy, while Princess Caroline commented on how much thinner and more handsome George appeared in the portrait she had seen of him. Prince George found his wife unattractive and "unhygienic" and could not bear to have intimate relations with her (he ensured he was drunk on the night of their wedding). Princess Caroline, on the other hand, was beloved by the public, who generally despised her husband, "the Prince of Pleasure," due to his continuous overindulgence and accumulating debts.

On January 29, 1820, George ascended to the throne as King of the United Kingdom and Hanover, with Caroline becoming Queen Consort in name. George sought a divorce from Caroline but couldn't obtain one due to the weak evidence against her. This was partly because Caroline was held in high regard by the public, who viewed George's conduct as immoral.

Caroline was barred from attending King George IV's coronation on July 19, 1821, and subsequently fell ill in London. Tragically, she passed away three weeks after the coronation she had not been allowed to attend. Her funeral procession moved slowly through London en route to Brunswick, where she was laid to rest. This allowed George to continue his romantic attachment to Maria Fitzherbert and entertain other mistresses.





The brass medallion, which I purchased a few years ago at **Oxfam in Epsom High Street**, likely belonged to one of Queen Caroline’s supporters before her death. It resembles a miniature portrait, much like the one of Prince George shown above. “Caroline Queen of England” is inscribed around the perimeter of the medallion, featuring a bust of King George IV’s lawful wife.

The brass medallion serves as a poignant reminder of how poorly Queen Caroline was treated by her husband, King George IV, and underscores the ongoing need to ensure that women from all cultures and walks of life are shown respect and treated fairly in today’s modern society.

# Fair photography of Ewell man celebrated

25 October 2023



Fairground enthusiast, **Philip Bradley of Ewell**, spent his life compiling a written and photographic record of every fair he visited from 1936 until his death in 1999. He amassed 30,000 photographs of fairs across the country and was highly regarded by showmen and fairground people. His collection, held at **Surrey History Centre**, is of national importance, providing an invaluable history of twentieth century fairgrounds (SHC ref 6790). You can find out more about Philip Bradley and his archive on the Exploring Surrey’s Past website



The top image shows a superb shot taken by Bradley of Elias Harris' Wall of Death ride, 'The Demon Riders', at Lindfield Fair, 1949.

We all remember the fun and excitement of going to fair – the thrilling rides, the sights and sounds of fairground machinery, eating too much candyfloss, and the tears and tantrums at not being able to win a cuddly toy on the coconut shy! If you're interested in researching fairgrounds in Surrey, or just want a trip down 'Memory Lane', look no further than our Exploring Surrey's Past website 'Fairgrounds in Surrey' theme pages to discover all about fairs in the county and the sources we hold here Fairgrounds in Surrey ([exploringsurreypast.org.uk](http://exploringsurreypast.org.uk)).

[Click here](#) for the full newsletter from Surrey History Centre

## Another King “Charles the III’s” Epsom affair

25 October 2023



**Bramshott House** in Epsom's Market Place is a late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Grade II listed building that was built to provide accommodation for the rich and famous of the period who wanted to visit Epsom and its well to sample its famous waters.

Now better known as the premises of Caffè Nero, Bramshott House displays a plaque reminding coffee lovers that a very special royal visitor used to be invited back to the building by a woman for a coffee as long ago as 1670.

The woman in question had a lively personality that attracted many men, the most notable being a King.

Called “pretty, witty Nell” by **Samuel Pepys** who praised her performances as one of the first actresses on the English stage, Eleanor (“Nell”) Gwynne rose from humble beginnings to become best known for being the favourite mistress of King Charles II, with whom she would go on to have two sons.

Having previously been the mistress of Charles Hart and Charles Sackville, Nell jokingly called the King “**her Charles the Third**”.











The love affair between **King Charles II** and **Nell Gwynne** began in April 1668 when Nell was attending a performance at the theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields and caught the attention of the King who preferred to flirt with Nell than watch the play (King Charles II never made any attempt to keep the affair a secret).

**Samuel Pepys** knew **Epsom** well and confirmed in his diary entry for 14 July 1667 that Nell Gwynne was in residence at what we now call Bramshott House where she helped “keep a merry house”. Nell lived in two little bay-windowed rooms overlooking the street, one of which was used as a bedroom and the other as a sitting room.

When Nell Gwynne entertained King Charles II, the King’s court would stay in **Epsom’s Assembly Rooms** (now occupied by **Wetherspoons**).

King Charles II died on 6 February 1685, but whilst on his deathbed made known his deep affection for “pretty, witty Nell” when instructing his brother, James II, “let not poor Nelly starve”.

Sadly, the two bay windows that Nell Gwynne used to look out of and the balcony she used to sit on, no longer form part of Bramshott House, but the plaques on the building and the King Charles II cast iron fire-back that that I purchased from **The Princess Alice Hospice** charity shop in **Church Street** in Epsom a few years ago help to remind us of a rags to royalty true-life story not unlike that of Cinderella that was acted out opposite the site of today’s Epsom’s Clock Tower by one of England’s earliest female actors.

Next time you order a coffee at **Caffe Nero** spare a thought for “pretty, witty Nell” who won the heart of a King, if not that of some unforgiving past historians.





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## Ugandan Asian refugees in Surrey 50 years on

25 October 2023



On 4 August 1972, the Ugandan dictator, General Idi Amin, ordered around 60,000 ethnic Asians to leave the country within 90 days. In the autumn and winter of 1972 to 1973, over 28,000 Ugandan Asians refugees who held British passports, arrived in the UK following their eviction, after hastily organised and often fraught journeys. Most left behind their entire wealth and worldly possessions.

The Home Office organised The Ugandan Resettlement Board (URB) to set up camps across the country in which to house in-coming refugees. The majority were billeted at large camps across the UK but one small temporary camp was located in Surrey, at Hobbs Barracks, near Lingfield.

In 2022, the ‘British Ugandan Asians at 50’ project marked the 50th anniversary of the expulsion of Asian communities from Uganda.

The **Surrey History Centre** has made the following appeal: “South Asian culture has made a significant impact on Britain and its rich and proud heritage has blended into the British way of life, contributing to the diversity of our nation. Celebrating South Asian Heritage Month (18 July to 17 August), provides an



opportunity for us to discover, embrace and celebrate the history and identity of British South Asians. Find out more about the South Asian Heritage Month campaign.

This year’s theme ‘Stories to tell’ promotes the unique stories that make up South Asian communities, but it is also an opportunity to share your memories and preserve them in the archives at Surrey History Centre. Documenting South Asian presence in Surrey is key to making our heritage collections representative of all communities in the county. If you have stories or material which you can contribute, we’d be delighted to hear from you.”

You can read more about the history of the Surrey county wide support for the refugees and other initiatives of the Surrey History Centre [HERE](#).

Surrey History Centre

Image: Refugees arriving at Stansted Airport 1972 cc: National Education Network

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## Orphans by mental ill-health and war

25 October 2023



Another tragic life that ended in Epsom and a burial in Europe’s largest and now abandoned asylum cemetery. The **Friends of Horton Cemetery**’s research project is bringing back to life the lives of the 9000 patients.

**Kate Bailey** née Cheer was born in 1882 in Abingdon, Berkshire to a farming family. Unfortunately, there is little cheer in this family’s story, which makes for a very sad read, tinged with a little mystery as to why her life unravelled.

It is most sad because her death in 1914 left two very young children who were then to lose their father later that year at Ypres, fighting in WW1.

**Theresa Kenefick-Conway** tells the full story on the website [www.hortoncemetery.org](http://www.hortoncemetery.org)



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## Esher monument cleaners risk arrest....

25 October 2023





An Esher monument so “grubby” that people want to clean with toothbrushes is an “enigma” as to who owns and is responsible for it.

The **White Lady Milestone** road marker, outside the former Cafe Rouge building on the approach to Esher, has been there since 1767. But the Grade II listed milestone is now looking “very grubby” according to one Elmbridge cabinet member, leading to “regular” emails from people who want to clean it up.

Elmbridge Councillor **Alex Batchelor** told a cabinet meeting on Wednesday (July 5) “it would be great” if anyone could help work out who was supposed to be responsible for the monument. Having had conversations with conservation officers at both Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council, Cllr Batchelor said as far as he could tell, no one was claiming responsibility for the Portsmouth Road landmark.

The borough council’s leader, Cllr **Bruce McDonald** (Liberal Democrat, Claygate) described it as an “enigma” for the council to ponder. Cllr Batchelor told the meeting: “It is a listed, National Heritage monument and it’s looking very, very grubby indeed. I constantly get [emails from] regular people who would like to show up with their toothbrushes, give it a good go. The only thing I have to promise them is that’s certainly likely to get them arrested.”

The cabinet were discussing the monument as they made the decision to add the former Cafe Rouge building, previously known as the Orleans Arms, to the council’s list of local heritage assets.

The former public house, dating back to 1856, was originally named after the Duke of Orleans, King Louis Philippe of France, who lived at nearby Claremont House.

Council documents show it provides evidence for development of Victorian Esher, and point to its prominent location on the historic route between London and Portsmouth.

As a “good example of Regency style building with continental influences” the building was added to the local list, which can be taken into account during planning applications.

Council documents describe assets on the local list as reinforcing “a sense of place and local distinctiveness” and providing a “tangible connection with our past lives, events, and industries”.

A previous planning application for 28 flats on the site was described by residents as “more suitable for the centre of Basingstoke” and “the ugliest residential housing scheme” that one had ever seen.