

Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

8 April 2026



A local Epsom charity's campaign to protect a forgotten cemetery appears to have helped shape national thinking on burial law reform.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery (FoHC), based in Epsom, made a detailed submission to the Law Commission in January 2025 calling for stronger legal protections for neglected burial grounds—particularly those in private ownership.

Now, with the publication of the Law Commission's report on Burial and Cremation in March 2026, several of the group's core concerns appear to have been recognised at the highest level of policy.

Horton Cemetery, the resting place of around 9000 former psychiatric patients from the Epsom hospital cluster, has long been at the centre of FoHC's work. Since its sale into private ownership in 1983, the site has suffered decades of neglect, with no public access and minimal maintenance.

In its **submission**, FoHC argued that the law currently leaves such sites in a regulatory vacuum, with no enforceable duty on owners to maintain them and limited powers for authorities to intervene.

That argument now appears to have gained traction.

The Law Commission's report identifies private burial grounds as an area of "real gaps in protection" and, for the first time, proposes a legal duty requiring all burial grounds—including privately owned ones—to be kept in "good order". The report also envisages inspection and enforcement powers at national level.

These proposals closely mirror FoHC's central recommendation that cemetery owners should be subject to a clear, enforceable maintenance obligation reflecting the historical and emotional significance of such sites.

However, other proposals put forward by the Epsom group have not yet been taken up in full.

FoHC had called for a statutory right of access for relatives, stronger powers for local authorities to intervene, and safeguards against speculative ownership and redevelopment. While the Commission acknowledges many of these issues—particularly the importance of access to graves—it stops short of recommending firm legal rights or stronger local enforcement mechanisms.

Speaking after the report's publication, Lionel Blackman, solicitor and secretary of the Friends of Horton Cemetery and author of the legal submission said "The recognition of the problem is an important step, even if the solutions remain incomplete."

The charity's work has also fed into ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Justice. At a recent meeting, organised by Patron of the Charity and local MP Helen Maguire with trustees of the charity, Theresa Keneflick and Kevin McDonnell and junior Minister Alex Davies-Jones MP, Horton Cemetery was cited as a real-world example of the kind of site falling through gaps in the current legal framework.

The Law Commission's reforms are expected to take several years to translate into legislation, with an initial Government response anticipated within six months.

For campaigners in Epsom, the message is clear: what began as a local effort to restore dignity to a neglected burial ground is now influencing the national conversation.

And while the law may not yet have caught up fully, Horton Cemetery is no longer being overlooked.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Horton Cemetery 1971

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Epsom's Cllr McCormick gives Middlesex revival the irregular iambic treatment

8 April 2026



Historic nostalgia could be upheld in naming a new Surrey council next year. Surrey County Council has backed a symbolic call to recognise Middlesex in the name of a future unitary authority. But councillors were all too aware the proposal had no legal power in officially changing the name.

This move comes amid plans to abolish all 12 of Surrey's existing borough, district and county councils and create two mega authorities to replace them, East Surrey and West Surrey. Middlesex was effectively abolished in 1965 and outside the living memory for many residents.

A majority of councillors supported a motion asking the government to name one of the new authorities "West Surrey and South Middlesex" as part of local government reorganisation due in 2027. Members voted 32 in favour, eight against with 24 abstentions at a full Surrey County council meeting on March 17.

The proposal, put forward by Robert Evans OBE (Stanwell and Stanwell Moor), centred on Spelthorne's long-standing ties to historic Middlesex. The borough is the only part of the old county that ended up in Surrey after boundary changes in the 1960s, and remains the only Surrey district north of the River Thames.

Cllr Evans told the chamber the Middlesex name still carries weight for many residents and "cannot be erased", arguing the change would recognise more than 1,000 years of shared history.

Cllr Harry Boparai, who put forward the same motion to Spelthorne Borough Council in January but was blocked, said he was "pleased" the issue was finally being heard. He explained how the name 'Middlesex', which may seem like a simple thing to some, "created a sense of connection to the place where I lived" and recognises the "heritage and identity" of the community.

But councillors explained that under current legislation, the final decision on any new council name will rest with the authority created after reorganisation not existing councils.

Even so, several members said the debate was about sending a message rather than making a binding decision. Cllr Sinead Mooney said "names really do matter", adding that the motion reflects a genuine sense of identity among Spelthorne residents. Another described it as a chance to show the new authority that heritage should not be overlooked.

Others were more cautious. Cllr Joanne Sexton, leader of Spelthorne Borough Council argued that now is not the right time to focus on naming, with major structural changes ahead. She said the priority should be "working together and maintaining unity" during the transition, suggesting the issue be decided later with public consultation.

Cllr **Steven McCormick** (RA Woodcote and Langley EEBC and Surrey County Councillor) delivered a tongue-in-cheek poem suggesting the name had effectively already been decided. He said: "So toast to the history of Spelthorne's old soul, while West Surrey wagons begin their first to roll." Cllr Edward Hawkins joked confusion over boundaries left them unsure "which way to go" on the vote.

Despite mixed views, several councillors said they would support the motion simply to acknowledge the strength of feeling locally. Given it was the council's last full meeting before the local election campaign gets underway, it is not surprising members did not want to rock the Middlesex boat, or vote.

Others opted to abstain, saying the decision ultimately lies elsewhere. In the end, the motion passed with cross-party backing.

While the result will not change the formal process, supporters hope it sends a clear signal: that for many in Spelthorne, Middlesex is more than just a historic footnote and it is still part of who they are.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Photo: David Howard Licence details

Remarkable Ukrainian who lived his final decades in Epsom

8 April 2026



MICHAEL BIALOGUSKI (1917-84) Ukrainian born Doctor, musician, conductor and spy who spent the last 20 years of his life in Epsom

Mykolo Bialoguski was born in Kiev (then in Russia, now in Ukraine) on 19 March 1917. His parents, Gregorii and Paulina, were Polish professionals, being a veterinary surgeon and dentist respectively. Gregorii was a non-practising Jew and Paulina a Christian.

Apparently, the family fled Kiev in about 1920, having nearly been shot by Bolsheviks, and from 1927 to 1935 Mykolo attended a secondary school in Wilno, Poland – which is now Vilnius, Lithuania, a graphic illustration of the ever-shifting political sands of Eastern Europe. He studied the viola and began to study medicine.

The Nazis invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, thus triggering World War 2. The political goings-on in relation to Poland at that time were hideously complicated and we shan't dwell on them here, but we do need to know where Mykolo was at the time and why he probably decided to leave. The following map will assist matters – Wilno is in the top right-hand portion and occupied by the Soviets.

In present-day terms Wilno/Vilnius is quite close to the Belarusian border, just over 200 km as the crow flies, and during WW2 Belarus (then the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) was initially under the control of the Soviets: however, in 1941 the Germans invaded and if, like Mykolo, you were both anti-communist and had a Jewish parent, then Wilno was not a place to be under either regime. (If you want to know more about Wilno during WW2 there is ample material on Wikipedia in the articles on Vilna Ghetto and Ponary Massacre.)

Mykolo had married an Irena Vandos in Poland at some point, but they were divorced in 1941. He had already been jailed briefly for protesting against some actions of the occupying Red Army and so, spinning a yarn about going to Curaçao, he travelled across Russia to Japan, the latter not yet having joined in WW2, although it did so in December 1941. Fortunately, Mykolo had arrived in Sydney, Australia by then and became Michael.

So, we are now in Sydney and in 1942 Michael enlisted in the Australian Army Medical Corps as an orderly; he was then discharged with Government approval and assistance to study medicine at the University of Sydney, which he did successfully. In 1943 he married divorcee Agnes Patricia Humphry (known as Patricia – they were ultimately divorced in 1954). After a year in general practice at Thirroul, a seaside suburb south of Sydney, he set up on Macquarie Street, in central Sydney itself.

Spying

One would think perhaps that building up a practice as a doctor in a thriving city district would be more than enough for any young man, but there were other facets to Michael. He was certainly anti-communism but that in itself doesn't turn you into a spy, especially if you're safely ensconced in Australia. It looks more as if he wanted to 'play spies' because he was fascinated with it all. He offered his services to the Commonwealth Investigation Service (CIS) in 1945 and was engaged as an agent: the CIS was apparently as secure as a chocolate padlock in terms of leaks and had been infiltrated by Soviet spies, which led to the creation of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). In 1949 Michael was engaged as an ASIO agent.

As is usually the case with that era of peculiar 'peace', spies, agents and double agents were everywhere and it was hard for them to know which side anyone was on, let alone any amateur researcher trying to make some sense of it 70 years or so later. Still, it must be done, as it was the man's main claim to 'fame'.

The Petrov Affair

Petrov had started out as Afanasy Shorokhov, born in 1907 to peasant parents in a Central Siberian village. In 1923 he joined an organisation for young communists and then the Soviet Navy, by which time his name had become Vladimir Proletarsky and later Vladimir Petrov. Having worked his way up, slowly, from cipher clerk in the Navy to the MGB (a predecessor of the KGB which dealt with myriad security and intelligence issues) he became third secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Canberra – or, to put it another way, a senior KGB officer and spy control in Australia. It was quite surprising that Petrov had survived Stalin's vicious purges and executions of officials over the years, but he had mainly worked under a very nasty piece of work named Lavrentiy Beria and nobody had managed to get rid of this vile man to date. Beria will become significant in a moment, but, returning to Australia, Petrov met Bialoguski and, against a background of mutual friendship, copious alcohol and prostitutes, Petrov thought he had recruited Bialoguski as a Soviet spy, whereas the latter continued to work for ASIO and was spying on Petrov.

Matters came to a head in 1953 when Stalin died and a power struggle ensued. Beria was confident of working his way to the very top, but certain people, Nikita Khrushchev in particular, had other ideas, and Beria was executed. Bialoguski and his colleague, Ron Richards, used this as part of the argument that Petrov should defect, saying that when he was recalled to the Soviet Union under the new regime, he would be in mortal danger. Another part of the persuasion was a large sum of money.

Petrov did defect in 1954, but had neglected to forewarn his wife, Evdokia (also a spy), who, when recalled by the Soviets, was torn between her sister back home and her husband.

Evdokia decided to cooperate with the Australian authorities. Next came a ghastly episode: she was kidnapped by Soviet agents and dragged kicking and screaming to an aircraft.

A high-ranking Australian official witnessed this and fired off an urgent telegram requesting Prime Ministerial intervention, as it was certain that Evdokia would come to a horrible end if she was taken to Moscow. When the plane landed for refuelling at Darwin, Australian police boarded, extricated her from the kidnappers and asked whether she wanted to go to Moscow or stay in Australia. You can guess what her answer was.

There was subsequently a Royal Commission investigating Soviet espionage in Australia, but there is no need to go into that here, save to say that it generated enormous press coverage and political wrangling. The Petrovs remained in Australia as Australian citizens.

As mentioned earlier, Michael and Patricia were divorced in 1954 and it wasn't an amicable parting. He wrote a book about the Petrov Affair, which was serialised in various newspapers and Patricia went to the papers with her own story. She said that he had a strange, almost weird, personality and that he was a clever, self-absorbed, manipulative and ambitious man who could also be charming and entertaining. This seemed to accord with others' views of him.

Michael was apparently a minor press celebrity for the rest of the 1950s but didn't seem to make significant headway with either his career or finances. In 1957 he applied for a reduction in Patricia's alimony, claiming that he hadn't made much money from the book and that his medical practice had suffered as a result of all the publicity. He got the reduction in alimony and in 1961 he won a libel case over Patricia's published allegations and was awarded £1,000 in damages.

Meanwhile, in 1957 he had married Nonnie Frieda Peifer, then a secretary; she had had a brief career as a film actress in minor roles under the name of Nonnie Piper in the late 1940s/early 1950s. He was still determined to pursue a musical career of some kind, preferably as a conductor, and had actually played the violin in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, but he wasn't getting anywhere on that front.

In about 1964 the family moved to England, where Michael continued to work in medicine but pursued his musical ambitions too. They lived at 24 Shawley Way, Epsom, which by a boundary quirk came under Tattenhams Ward, Banstead for election purposes and is now designated as 'Reigate and Banstead'.

Finally, Michael was able to study conducting and conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1969 he conducted at the Royal Albert Hall, then he formed the Commonwealth Philharmonic Orchestra and also wielded the baton in Westminster Abbey. Perhaps at last he had found his true vocation.

Michael died of cancer on 29 July 1984 at Kingswood, Surrey. Nonnie remained in England and lived until 14 February 2020, aged 89. She was survived by three of her children and several grandchildren.

Linda Jackson 2023

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A surprise glimpse into 1883: Christ Church Epsom Common's Parish Magazine

Epsom author shares personal epilepsy journey amid town's historic link to the condition

8 April 2026



An Epsom author has published a deeply personal account of living with epilepsy, adding a modern voice to a local story

that stretches back more than a century.

Madeline Bolton-Smith, who lives in Epsom and works as a probate assistant at a family-run accountancy firm in nearby Fetcham, has written *Diary of an Epileptic*, a book describing her experience of diagnosis, treatment and life with the neurological condition.

Epilepsy affects around one in every hundred people in the UK, yet many newly diagnosed patients still feel isolated when confronting the condition for the first time. Bolton-Smith says her motivation for writing the book was to provide reassurance and solidarity to others navigating similar uncertainty.

“When I was diagnosed with epilepsy, I often felt very alone,” she explains. “Writing the book was my way of saying to others in that position that their feelings are valid and that they are not facing it on their own.”

Her account follows the realities of living with epilepsy from the moment of diagnosis through investigative medical procedures, struggles to secure treatment funding and undergoing Laser Interstitial Thermal Therapy (LITT) surgery. When the surgery did not bring the hoped-for outcome, she had to confront the challenge of adapting to life with epilepsy once again.

The book reflects openly on the emotional impact of the condition – fear, frustration and isolation – but also the resilience required to continue forward. Bolton-Smith hopes the honesty of her story will help readers and families dealing with epilepsy feel less alone.

Epsom’s historical link to epilepsy

Bolton-Smith’s story also resonates with a significant but little-known chapter of local history.

In the early twentieth century Epsom was home to the **Ewell Epileptic Colony**, later known as St Ebba’s Hospital. Established during a period when epilepsy was poorly understood and widely feared, the colony reflected the prevailing belief that people with the condition should live apart from mainstream society.

Opened in 1903, the colony formed part of the wider Horton Estate of hospitals built by the London County Council to treat mental illness and neurological disorders. Hundreds of patients with epilepsy lived and worked there in what was intended to be a self-contained rural community.

Residents grew food, maintained workshops and followed strict daily routines designed to create stability for those prone to seizures. While some patients experienced relative independence compared with traditional asylum conditions, the colony nevertheless represented an era when epilepsy carried heavy stigma and separation from ordinary life was seen as necessary.

The institution eventually became St Ebba’s Hospital and continued operating for decades before closing in the late twentieth century as attitudes and treatments changed.



Remembering the patients buried in Horton Cemetery

The lives of many former residents of the Horton hospitals, including St Ebba’s, are remembered today through the work of the **Friends of Horton Cemetery**. The charity seeks to restore this historic Epsom cemetery, the largest asylum cemetery in Europe, to community ownership and researches the lives of those buried there.

More than 9,000 patients from the surrounding hospitals were laid to rest in the cemetery, many with little recognition during their lifetimes. The charity’s website, hortoncemetery.org, shares their stories.

The contrast between that earlier era and the present day illustrates how far attitudes toward epilepsy have progressed. Modern medicine emphasises treatment, independence and inclusion rather than segregation.

[CLICK here](#) for the story of Matilda DUNKINSON



Changing understanding of epilepsy

Medical knowledge of epilepsy has advanced dramatically over the past century. Once widely misunderstood and surrounded by superstition, epilepsy is now recognised as a neurological condition caused by abnormal electrical activity in the brain.

Treatments today range from anti-seizure medications to specialised surgical procedures such as the LITT therapy Bolton-Smith underwent. Support networks, advocacy groups and greater public awareness have also helped reduce stigma.

Yet challenges remain, particularly for those newly diagnosed. Bolton-Smith believes that sharing lived experiences can play a vital role in helping others understand the realities of the condition.

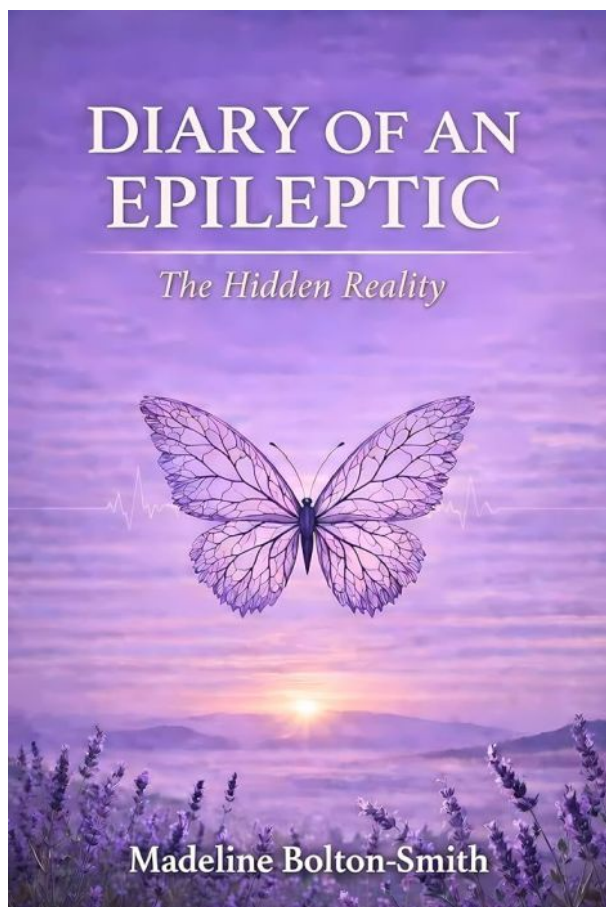
Through *Diary of an Epileptic*, she hopes to contribute to that wider conversation while offering practical reassurance to readers facing similar circumstances.

Diary of an Epileptic: The Hidden Reality is available online.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Photo: The author on Epsom Common



Surrey's suffragette composer re-imagined in many ways

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Rediscovering long forgotten music does not mean recovering how it was meant to be performed, and that is a major challenge for the arts, finds a new study from the University of Surrey. An expert found that rediscovered music comes with no shared understanding for how it should sound, leaving performers to make radically different

interpretive choices that reshape the work itself.

In an article published in *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, a researcher focused on a little-known piano miniature by Surrey-based British composer Ethel Smyth, written in the late nineteenth century and forgotten for 120 years. When the piece re-emerged in the 1990s and began to be performed again, no traditions of interpretation had survived. There were no clear instructions for tempo, expression or dynamics, and no recordings of historical performances to learn from.

To understand what happens when performers face this problem, the research compared all professional recordings of the same rediscovered work. Using specialist audio analysis software, each performance was measured beat by beat to track tempo and rhythmic fluctuation across the piece.

Each pianist approached the music in a fundamentally different way, particularly at its unfinished ending. Some slowed dramatically, others pushed forward and none aligned closely with one another. Even the earliest modern recording failed to establish a shared interpretive reference point.

Dr Christopher Wiley, author of the study and Head of Music and Media at the University of Surrey, said:

“When musicians open a score like this, they are standing on empty ground. While written in standard notation that is commonly understood, there is no inherited wisdom to lean on as to how the piece is supposed to be played. What I found when analysing modern recordings was not small variation in interpretation but completely different musical identities emerging from the same notes. This is creative and exciting, but also unsettling.”

The research argues that this challenge will only grow, as more pieces by historically marginalised composers are rediscovered. Nor is it an issue unique to music: performers across arts disciplines such as theatre and dance will likewise increasingly encounter works stripped of their original interpretive traditions.

Rather than relying solely on manuscripts, the study proposes more imaginative solutions: performers may need to draw on unconventional sources such as letters, memoirs and personal writings to guide interpretation. In this case, Smyth’s later autobiographical descriptions of the person she aimed to portray through her music offered valuable insight into its character, mood and emotional intent.

Surrey University



Image: Ethel Smyth with score to her composition *March of the Women* in the background. Sources: English composer and suffragette Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) Library of Congress’s Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID ggbain.33693, Author George Grantham Bain Collection; Restored by Adam Cuerden Score: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/smyth-march-of-the-women>. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication. Montage created by Epsom and Ewell Times and is copyrighted.

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: Dame Ethel Mary Smyth DBE (22 April 1858 – 8 May 1944) was an English composer and a member of the women’s suffrage movement. Her compositions include songs, works for piano, chamber music, orchestral works, choral works and operas. She lived in Surrey from childhood.

A surprise glimpse into 1883: Christ Church Epsom Common’s Parish Magazine

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Out of the blue, Christ Church Epsom Common was recently approached by a Worcestershire-based bookseller and gratefully accepted her kind gift of a bound volume (about the size of a modern paperback) of parish magazines from 1883. The volume, too battered and niche for resale, nonetheless provides a fascinating glimpse into the life of the parish

just seven years after the church's consecration in 1876.

There were Christ Church parish magazines before this: the January 1883 edition refers to an item in the now-lost December 1882 magazine. As with many such publications, they were seen as ephemeral at the time. Although issued monthly, the next surviving edition in the Christ Church archive dates from 1900, with records then remaining patchy until the late 1940s, when systematic retention began.

Both the gold-stamped spine and the frontispiece give the contents simply as *Parish Magazine 1883*, with no mention of the parish name. The editor is listed as J Erskine Clarke MA, an Anglican clergyman who, in January 1859, launched what is regarded as the world's first commercial parish magazine inset, prosaically titled *Parish Magazine*. Each monthly edition ran to around 24 pages and combined religious material with a surprisingly wide range of secular content.

Alongside sermons and Bible studies were items of fiction (often moralising), practical advice, articles on British wildlife, and descriptions of churches and places at home and abroad. The 1883 editions included pieces such as *First Aid to the Sick*, *Making a Will*, an account of a visit to Malta, an unexpectedly open-minded article on Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, and the intriguingly titled *Worms and their Habits*. Each issue carried at least two engraved illustrations, particularly to accompany the travel articles.

The inset was published by Wells Gardner, Darton & Company of Paternoster Buildings, London, specialists in ecclesiastical publishing, and printed by Strangeways & Sons. It was always intended to be surrounded by locally produced parish material. At Christ Church this usually amounted to a further eight pages, printed and bound with the inset by local firm L W Andrews & Son. In some months, when local material ran to only four pages, the usual plain cover was altered to make better use of the available space.

Parishioners paid 2d per issue - roughly £1 in today's money.

Much of the local content was routine but revealing. Each issue set out the full schedule of services for the coming month, listing not only Sunday services but weekday Mattins and Evensong, along with the hymns to be sung. Lists of baptisms, marriages and funerals followed, together with a standard notice inviting women to offer Thanksgiving after Childbirth, "there being no fee, but it being usual for a Thank-offering to be made at the Altar". Details of the previous month's collections were also carefully recorded.

Christ Church did not acquire its own church hall until 1899, so meetings and events were held in a variety of venues. The January 1883 magazine lists the Vicarage, the Working Men's Club, the Infant School and the Guild Room. The then-new Working Men's Club, opened in 1881 and later renamed the Epsom Common Club, stood just across Stamford Green.

The Infant School, now lost, stood on West Hill (then known as Clay Hill). Founded through an 1844 endowment by Miss Elizabeth Trotter of Horton Manor, O'Kelly's former racing stables were converted for the education of children from families on Epsom Common. The school closed in 1925 and was later demolished.

Another regular feature was the "Penny Bank", encouraging thrift among parishioners. Deposits could be made weekly at the Vicarage, with interest paid at 2½ per cent - or 5 per cent for children attending Christ Church Sunday School.

The January issue opened with a letter from the Vicar, the Revd Archer Hunter, then barely a year into what would become a 30-year incumbency. After setting out his vision for the developing parish, he appealed for more Sunday School teachers and closed by wishing all a Happy New Year - though only, he cautioned, for those "determined to spend it in the constant Presence of their God and Saviour".

Later editions offer vivid glimpses of parish life. February records a recitation of *Dickens' Christmas Carol* in the Infant School room, delivered by Mr Mechelen Rogers before a large audience. While not all were amused, those "qualified to give an opinion" spoke in the highest terms of his performance, promising him an "enthusiastic and noiseless" reception should he return.

March saw the founding of a parish branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, with 37 parishioners unanimously adopting a strongly worded resolution identifying intemperance as a source of poverty, crime and irreligion. Members signed pledges ranging from total abstinence to more qualified commitments, and the movement quickly attracted both adult and juvenile members.

The same edition listed the parish's current "Wants", including Sunday School teachers, a parish bier, a bookcase and books for a parochial library, and a new organ stop. It is a pleasing historical coincidence that this very volume survives bearing a library label inside its front cover, suggesting it was once item number 436 in that collection and heavily used.

For parishes that bound their magazines into annual volumes, the national publishers supplied a frontispiece and index, with the binding undertaken locally. A small label inside the rear cover of this book shows it was bound by John Snashall of Epsom High Street. Though now in poor condition, the quality of the leather spine and gold-blocked title speak of careful craftsmanship.

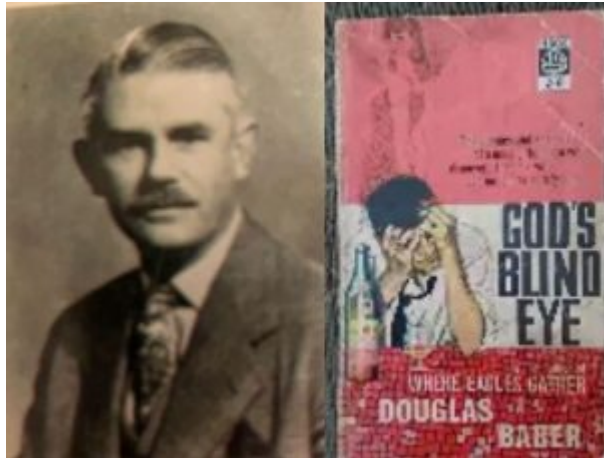
More than a century on, this battered volume offers a remarkably intimate picture of parish life in Victorian Epsom Common - practical, moral, communal and often surprisingly vivid.

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Image: Christ Church from postcard 1900 and the front pages of the January and April 1883 editions by Roger Morgan © 2022

Tragedy of War Hero turned writer who lived in Epsom

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In June 1960, Douglas Baber, 42, was found comatose through drink in the garden of his former home in Woodcote Green, a well-to-do housing estate in Epsom. A court appearance followed, during which the magistrate noted that Baber had been before the Epsom bench seven times on drink-related charges. Baber, for his part, expressed appreciation for the care the Epsom constabulary had shown him while in custody. The Sutton and Epsom Advertiser described him as a “local author”, but there was far more to Douglas Gordon Baber than that.

Born in Belfast in 1918, he was living in middle-class comfort in South Croydon by 1921 in a household that included his mother Isabella, siblings and two servants. His father, Charles Johnstone Baber, was absent, later remarrying in 1929 and fathering a daughter, Hazel. Charles was an entrepreneur in the high-end footwear trade, at one time operating a shop on London’s Regent Street.

The family later moved to Bexhill on the south coast. At 11, Douglas came to public attention when newspapers reported his dramatic rescue after being swept out to sea by Channel currents — perhaps an early sign of the adventurous spirit that would define him. He developed a passion for flight and, in 1935 at just 17 years old, obtained a flying licence in a Gipsy Moth plane. On his certificate, he described himself as a student in boot and shoe manufacturing, likely intending to follow his father’s trade.

In 1937 Douglas travelled to Canada, finding work in factory administration. But the outbreak of the Second World War brought those plans to an end. He returned to England, enlisted in the RAF and, at 21, was flying bomber planes over occupied Europe as a Flight Lieutenant in 77 Squadron.

On 17 August 1941 he bailed out over Belgium and survived. He fled the crash site and was given refuge by the Rigaux family, farmers in Zingem, who risked their lives by sheltering him under German occupation. After nearly three weeks, German soldiers raided the farm following a suspected tip-off. Douglas was captured and the Rigaux family taken away to an uncertain fate. At Gestapo HQ in Brussels, he later said he was first subjected to rough treatment, then friendliness, then threats to shoot him — a deliberate psychological tactic.

Douglas passed through several POW camps: Dulag Luft in Germany, then Oflag XC in Lübeck, followed by Oflag VI-B Warburg, where he was imprisoned at the same time as the celebrated pilot Douglas Bader. The similarity in their names likely caused administrative confusion, and it is improbable the two men were not at least aware of each other.

In 1942 Baber was transferred to Oflag XXI-B Schubin in Poland, where fellow prisoners included future Chancellor Anthony Barber and Eric Williams, author of *The Wooden Horse*. He was later sent to Stalag Luft III at Sagan — now Zagan, Poland — famous for *The Great Escape*. Fellow prisoners included Paul Brickhill, who would later write *Reach for the Sky*, and actors Peter Butterworth and Rupert Davies. In February 1945 Douglas was moved again, to Marlag Nord, where he was soon liberated by Allied forces.

After returning home, Douglas collaborated with two former POWs to write *Oflag 3*, a play about prison camp life. Directed by Charles Hawtrey and featuring a young Pete Murray, it was staged at the X Theatre in Richmond and well received. Misleading online claims that Hawtrey collaborated with Douglas Bader rather than Douglas Baber have unfortunately muddied the historical record.

Douglas married Phyllis Fox in 1947. Their daughter Vivienne was born in 1950, and the family settled first in Christchurch Mount and later on the Woodcote Estate. His writing career flourished. He first signed with avant-garde publisher Werner Laurie, then with Heinemann, who released his debut crime novel *My Death is a Mockery* in 1952. The book, involving the murder of a policeman, was an immediate success and was quickly adapted into a film starring Donald Houston, Kathleen Byron and Bill Kerr.

The film became embroiled in the notorious Craig and Bentley case after Christopher Craig, the 16-year-old who shot PC Sidney Miles, revealed he had seen it earlier that day. Tabloid speculation unfairly pointed towards Baber, and he began receiving hate mail. This publicity placed immense strain on him and his family. Douglas had already shown vulnerability: in 1950 he was convicted of assaulting a ticket collector after a POW reunion. He expressed deep remorse in court, admitting to having drunk too much.

Through the 1950s Douglas published prolifically, producing *Where Eagles Gather*, *The Guarded Years*, *Love on the Verge*, *A Road to Disaster*, *The Mortal Triumph* and *The Slender Thread*, alongside short stories and journalism. He also

published under the name John Ritson and worked as a publishing editor and executive. In 1956 he became advertising promotion manager at ABC TV, part of the early ITV network. On the surface, life in the stockbroker belt appeared successful.

But privately Douglas was spiralling. He increasingly found himself in Epsom Police Station for drink-related incidents, and once smashed his car into a shop in Bexhill. His marriage appears to have come under great strain. According to his daughter Vivienne, Douglas was devastated when he learned during the 1950s that members of the courageous Rigaux family who had sheltered him had been murdered by the Gestapo or deported to camps, where some later died. She said the guilt haunted him for the rest of his life.

It is easy to imagine how the emotional burden drove him towards alcohol. In 1963 he was still producing work — he published a short story in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* and took a post as advertisement controller on the Reverend Timothy Beaumont's magazine *Aspect*. But on 21 October 1963 Douglas Gordon Baber died at 21 The Hill, Wheathampstead, near St Albans. He was only 45.

One of his later works, *God's Blind Eye* (1960), features a businessman battling alcoholism. A line from the book seems to echo Baber's own torment: "When the effects of the alcohol wore off, the sense of impending disaster and loneliness was far worse, crouched in his mind like an enemy."

Martin Knight



“Us and Them” visualises connections with former Epsom patients

8 April 2026



A ground-breaking heritage project exploring the lives of disabled people detained in Surrey's former mental hospitals is turning fresh attention on Horton Cemetery in Epsom – the burial ground of some 9,000 men, women and children whose resting place remains locked, overgrown and inaccessible under the control of a property speculator who has neglected the site since the 1980s.

Freewheelers Theatre and Media, a creative company of disabled artists based in Leatherhead, is leading *Us and Them*, a National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported initiative using original medical portrait photographs and case records from Surrey's long-closed asylums. Working with photographer Emma Brown, community history group On the Record and researchers at King's College London, they are uncovering the stories of patients whose voices were seldom heard in their lifetimes. The project includes new wet-collodion portraits of Freewheelers members made using the same Victorian techniques once used in institutions such as The Manor Hospital and West Park. These contemporary portraits will be shown alongside the originals in a touring exhibition, with the first major display due to take place at The Horton, Epsom, in 2026.

For Epsom, the work resonates particularly with Horton Cemetery – the former burial ground for patients from the Epsom Cluster hospitals, including The Manor, Horton, Long Grove, West Park and St Ebba's. Despite its national historic significance as the largest asylum cemetery in the UK, the cemetery has been left to decay for decades and remains closed to relatives, historians and the wider community. The Friends of Horton Cemetery continue to campaign for its return to public or charitable ownership so that the site can be restored, documented and respected as the resting place it once was.

The Freewheelers project highlights the human stories behind those buried there. One participant, Alice Scott, chose to pair herself with Rose Harris, a woman confined to The Manor Hospital in 1910 and buried in a pauper plot at Horton Cemetery in 1917. Another member, Pete Messer, recreated the photograph of workhouse survivor Frederick Tarrant, who spent 15 years in various institutions, part of the same system that funnelled thousands of patients to unmarked graves in Epsom.

Historians involved in *Us and Them* emphasise how the original photographs were created without consent for purposes of classification and diagnosis, often contributing to stigma. Today, the Freewheelers portraits aim to prompt public reflection on how disability is perceived and represented, and how society remembers – or forgets – those who lived and

died within institutional care. The project's December creative sessions coincide with a Christie's auction of similar historical images, underlining renewed public interest in the stories of institutionalised people.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery say the renewed national attention generated by projects like *Us and Them* strengthens the argument that the burial ground must be brought back into community hands. Volunteers have long argued that the cemetery is a unique and irreplaceable heritage site, containing the life histories of people from across Britain and the world, many of whom have living descendants still searching for answers.

Recent BBC reporting has highlighted the scale of the neglect, the site's condition and the growing calls for public ownership. For many families, the cemetery is the last physical link to relatives whose lives were shaped by the former Epsom institutions. Campaigners say that without intervention, the stories now being rediscovered risk remaining disconnected from the very place where so many of those patients were laid to rest.

More information about the Friends' campaign and the history of the site and some 500 personal stories of the patients buried in the Epsom Hospital Cluster cemetery in Hook Road/Horton Lane, Epsom can be found at www.hortoncemetery.org

Sam Jones - Reporter



See BBC coverage here:

Disability group recreates Victorian hospital images

'Grandad is one of 9,000 buried in derelict site'

Call for public ownership of asylum cemetery

Related reports in Epsom and Ewell Times:

Portraits of pauper patients in Epsom's Horton Cemetery, inspires artist

Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

Another Horton Cemetery Life Story

Image: Background Horton Cemetery: *photographed on 28 February 1971 by L R James. Epsom & Ewell Local & Family History Centre.* Foreground: Courtesy Friends of Horton Cemetery

British Railways' 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

8 April 2026



Free exhibition train to steam into Tattenham Corner

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

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

What visitors can expect

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

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

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

Tattenham Corner’s royal railway history

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

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

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

A milestone for Britain’s railways

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tickets

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Bit of Epsom history for sale

8 April 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



Tracing the history of poor relief in Epsom and Ewell

8 April 2026



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Visit:

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

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

Tips for local researchers

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

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

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

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

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

Sam Jones - Reporter



A former Epsom Long Grove Hospital patient remembered for his pacifism

8 April 2026



Barney Cohen (1897-1970)

By his nephew, Andy Strowman

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

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

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

When the Second World War broke out, he enlisted. But when faced with the prospect of killing, he refused. He simply

could not harm another human being. For that courage — for it was courage — he was punished. He was placed in the guardhouse and later imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs as a conscientious objector.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Andy Strowman

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

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