

# Historic 1848 Epsom Racecourse Plan Saved Through Major Conservation Project

4 June 2026



A remarkable hand-coloured plan of Epsom Racecourse dating from 1848 has been rescued from severe deterioration following an extensive conservation project.

The historic document, which provides a detailed record of the racecourse in the mid-19th century, had reached a fragile state. Conservators warned that without intervention valuable information about the history and development of the course could have been lost forever.

## A Race Against Time

The plan was prioritised for treatment because of its worsening condition and the fact that much of its detail had become obscured beneath a darkened varnish layer.

Conservators found the document had suffered from multiple forms of damage over the years.

The paper itself was made from machine-produced wood pulp, which is naturally acidic and becomes increasingly brittle as the fibres deteriorate. At some point the plan had been mounted on a linen backing using starch paste, but the paper had begun separating from the fabric. In places, fragments had broken away altogether.

Evidence also suggested the document had previously been stored in damp conditions, leaving mould staining across parts of the surface.

Further damage had been caused by the way the map had originally been displayed. Wooden poles had been attached using nails driven through the paper, leaving rust stains and tears, particularly along the upper edge.

Perhaps most significantly, the entire plan had been coated in a thick glossy varnish which had darkened dramatically over time, concealing much of the image beneath.

## Delicate Conservation Work

The first stage of treatment involved removing the remaining wooden pole to prevent further damage during handling.

Conservators then carefully detached the mould-stained linen backing before carrying out extensive surface cleaning on both sides of the document. Throughout the process the plan was supported on woven polyester sheeting to ensure that loose fragments remained safely in place.

Attention then turned to the dark varnish coating.

Specialist tests were undertaken using a range of solvents to identify the safest and most effective method of removal. Once a suitable solvent had been selected, conservators worked section by section to lift the varnish without harming the original inks and pigments.

Using a Japanese paper barrier and a solvent gel, the varnish was gradually drawn away from the surface and transferred onto the paper layer.

The process was compared by conservators to waxing, with the Japanese paper peeled away carrying the dissolved varnish with it.

As the treatment progressed, details hidden for decades began to reappear.

Although some staining remained embedded deep within the paper fibres, the plan's image and written information became visible once again, making the document accessible for the first time in many years.

## Washing and Stabilisation

Following varnish removal, the plan underwent a careful washing process designed to remove any remaining residues.

Once the rinse water ran clear, the paper was treated with a mild alkaline solution to neutralise acidity and slow future deterioration.

The document was then lined with a specially selected Japanese paper backing. Favoured by conservators for its purity, flexibility and exceptional strength, Japanese paper provides long-term support while remaining lightweight and unobtrusive.

After several days of drying, missing sections of the original document were filled using handmade paper closely matched

in tone and thickness.

Conservators emphasised that the work followed established conservation principles rather than restoration. Repairs remain visible and distinguishable from the original material, ensuring future researchers can identify what is original and what has been added.

All treatments are reversible, with wheat starch paste used as the adhesive. Bleaching treatments, which can brighten paper but may accelerate deterioration over time, were deliberately avoided.

### Preserved for Future Generations

Once fully dried, trimmed and stabilised, the restored plan was placed within an archival polyester sleeve and transferred to environmentally controlled strongroom storage.

The conservation team believes that without intervention the plan would have continued to darken, weaken and eventually disintegrate.

Instead, this important piece of Epsom's racing heritage has been secured for future generations, preserving a unique snapshot of the racecourse as it appeared nearly 180 years ago.

The conservation project not only saved the physical document but also revealed historical information that had been hidden beneath layers of damage and ageing for many decades.

Surrey County Council- History Centre



For more news from Surrey History Centre [READ HERE](#)

---

## 500 patients buried in Epsom's asylum cemetery no longer forgotten

4 June 2026



A team of researchers volunteering for the local charity The Friends of Horton Cemetery have reached a milestone in their quest to write the histories of 9000 patients buried in the abandoned privately owned Horton Cemetery. The cemetery, reputed to be the largest asylum cemetery in Europe, is situated at the junction of Hook Road and Horton Lane. The story of Marjorie is the 500th published on the charity's website

A discarded headstone rescued from a skip more than forty years ago led researchers to uncover the poignant story of a young woman buried at Horton Cemetery — and reconnect her memory with living family members.

Before the cemetery was sold by the NHS in 1983 to a property speculator, notices appeared in the local press informing relatives that they could reclaim the headstones of loved ones buried there. Families were warned that any memorials left behind would be destroyed.

At the time, an electrical engineer working on a project within the former Epsom hospital cluster discovered one such stone which had been thrown into a skip. Appalled at what he later described as a "blatant disregard" for somebody's final resting place, he rescued the memorial and took it home for safekeeping.

Today, the headstone remains carefully preserved, with the hope that one day it may be returned to the cemetery where it was originally intended to stand in perpetuity.

The inscription reads simply:

Marjorie Young  
14th September 1948  
Aged 27 years  
R.I.P.

As researchers from the Friends of Horton Cemetery began investigating Marjorie's life, they were astonished to discover that a relative was still alive and able to shed light on her tragic story.

The relative, whose mother was Marjorie's first cousin, said: "Your message is a welcome bolt from the blue. I can't believe that after all these years somebody is interested in Marjorie. I didn't know her but my mother so often talked about her. My mother died in 2015 but she still had nightmares about the life Marjorie led."

His words underline one of the central aims of the Friends of Horton Cemetery — ensuring that those buried in the former asylum cemetery are not forgotten.

Research into burial records revealed another heartbreaking detail. The cemetery register records that Marjorie was buried in grave 2892b alongside a "stillborn female child". Marjorie was buried with a stillborn child who researchers believe belonged to an unknown patient.

Such practices were sadly not uncommon. Before changes introduced during the 1980s, hospitals frequently arranged the burial of stillborn babies with little or no consultation with grieving parents. Often, infants were buried in existing graves within institutional cemeteries.

### **A Family Marked by Tragedy**

Marjorie's father, Charles Young, was born in 1894 to Harry Young and Ellen Fanny Young, née Chesterman. According to family recollections, Ellen gave birth to as many as 23 children, though only a handful survived infancy.

The family experienced repeated tragedy. In 1905, Charles's younger sister Minnie died after suffering an epileptic seizure during the night. An inquest heard that Minnie sometimes endured as many as thirteen fits a day. Researchers later discovered that Marjorie herself also suffered from epilepsy.

Charles married Ethel Mary Davis at St Augustine's Church in 1920.

### **A Childhood of Fear and Isolation**

Born on 10 June 1921, Marjorie was an only child. Family testimony has painted a troubling picture of her upbringing. Her cousin recalled stories passed down by his mother: "Marjorie was very clever and wanted to study. She was an only child so welcomed the company of my mother. As time went on it became clear to my mother that Marjorie was terrified, the reason being that her parents went out every night and left her alone in the dark. Neighbours talked of Marjorie standing at the window looking out in the dark.

"Eventually poor Marjorie had a breakdown and was admitted to hospital and my mother never saw her again."

Public records relating to Marjorie are scarce. In the 1939 Register, compiled at the outbreak of the Second World War, she was living in Lambeth and working as a civil servant for His Majesty's Office of Works, the government department responsible for public buildings.

The next surviving record appears nine years later.

On 14 September 1948, Marjorie died at Long Grove Hospital aged just 27. Her death certificate records broncho-pneumonia and exhaustion caused by epilepsy. She was buried at Horton Cemetery on 21 September 1948.

### **Someone Cared Enough to Remember**

Researchers believe one detail about Marjorie's story is especially important. She had a headstone.

At Horton Cemetery, where thousands were buried in unmarked graves, memorial stones were rare. Someone cared enough to arrange and pay for a marker. Someone completed the paperwork and ensured her resting place was acknowledged. It is also possible that family members attended her funeral.

For her surviving relative, the rediscovery of the headstone has brought comfort. "It is wonderful to hear that her gravestone survives and that has led to her being your 500th story. If only I could tell my mother. She would have been so pleased to know that somebody still cares about Marjorie.

"I think you've done a wonderful job and somehow righted some of the wrongs."

Today, the rescued headstone stands not only for Marjorie Young, but symbolically for the estimated 9,000 forgotten souls buried within Horton Cemetery.

Perhaps one day it will stand there once again.

More research stories can be found on the Horton Cemetery website at [Horton Cemetery](#)

---

The Friends of Horton Cemetery seek to restore the cemetery to community ownership. The case for a compulsory purchase order was blocked by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The charity now pins its hopes on a fresh approach from the East Surrey Unitary Council. The charity has the support of Epsom and Ewell's MP Helen Maguire, who is engaging with the Ministry of Justice on the issue.

Theresa Keneflick-Conway

Related reports:

[Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform](#)

[Epsom and Ewell's MP champion's Friends of Horton Cemetery mission on "Time to Talk Day"](#)

[Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds](#)

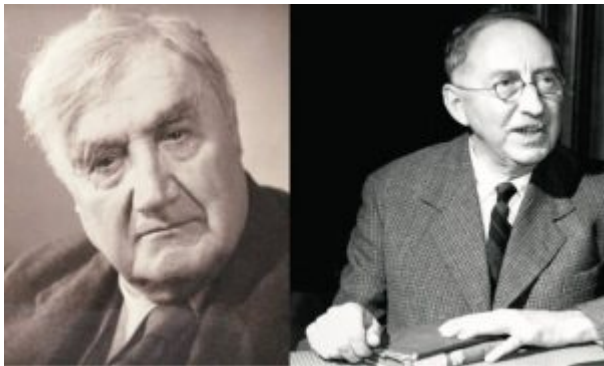
Petition to reclaim Horton Cemetery from property speculator

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

---

## Dorking's role as a refuge from Nazi oppression

4 June 2026



Papers documenting how novelist E.M. Forster and composer Ralph Vaughan Williams helped refugees fleeing Nazi persecution find shelter in the Surrey town of Dorking are to be made fully accessible online for the first time, through a new project led by the University of Surrey and Dorking Museum.

The Dorking and District Refugee Committee was established in 1938 to support people escaping Nazi oppression in central Europe. Operating throughout the Second World War, the committee found housing, work and medical care for refugees, and later helped Dorking's German and Czech nationals apply to Home Office tribunals to avoid internment as enemy aliens. Its records – held by Dorking Museum – are of national and international significance, containing individual stories of displacement, solidarity and community response during one of the darkest periods in modern history.

The project, Accessing Refugee History in Surrey, is funded by the Community Foundation for Surrey and led by Professor Constance Bantman and Dr Beth Palmer from the University of Surrey's School of Arts, Humanities and Creative Industries. It will create a new web-based archive, making the committee's records fully searchable and publicly available, alongside teaching and support resources for schools, researchers and community groups. A launch event and other activities to publicise this significant resource will take place later in 2026.

Among the stories contained in the records is that of Sir Erich Reich, who arrived in Britain on a Kindertransport in 1939, aged four. With his older brothers sent elsewhere, Vaughan Williams personally brought the young boy to Burchett House in Dorking – a hostel provided rent-free by the Duke of Newcastle – where refugees received support from the committee. Reich went on to become a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist, and credited Dorking with saving his life.

The committee's work extended beyond housing. When war was declared in 1939, Dorking's German nationals faced internment. The committee intervened on behalf of individuals, including Erika Schmidt-Landry, a former journalist whose husband had been interned on the Isle of Man, and who faced the prospect of placing her three children in an orphanage. Forster and Vaughan Williams took up her case directly.

Professor Constance Bantman, Head of Literature and Languages and Professor of French History at the University of Surrey, said

"These records tell the stories of people who were forced to leave everything behind, and of a community that chose to help them. Making this archive accessible means those stories – of both the refugees and the people of Dorking who supported them – can be understood and learned from by a much wider audience. At a time when questions about refuge and displacement remain urgent, this history has a great deal to teach us."

Dr Beth Palmer, Associate Professor in English Literature at the University of Surrey, said:

"The Dorking Refugee Committee papers are a remarkable collection. They document not just the administrative work of the committee but the human detail – the individual cases, the letters, the decisions that changed lives. Our aim is to make all of this available to researchers, educators and the public, and to provide resources that help people engage with this important chapter of Surrey's history."

Kathy Atherton, Chair and exhibitions, Dorking Museum, said:

*"The papers of the Dorking Refugee Committee are one of the most popularly requested by researchers in the archive. Covering the period from 1938 into the post-war period and immensely detailed, the papers are of national interest in documenting the refugee experience during these years.*

*"We are very pleased to be working with the team from the University of Surrey to bring these papers to a wider audience whilst at the same time protecting the originals from excessive handling."*

The project will also produce teaching resources designed to support engagement with the collection, making the archive a practical tool for education alongside its research value.

Surrey University



Image: R Vaugan-Williams and EM Forster

---

## Glyn Hall faces uncertain future as trustees issue urgent appeal to save Ewell landmark

4 June 2026



A historic community building at the heart of Ewell is at risk of being lost permanently unless urgent support can be secured.

Glyn Hall, situated on Cheam Road in Ewell Village, has served local residents for generations as a space for education, social gatherings and community activity. The hall traces its origins back to around 1870 and was later bequeathed for the benefit of Ewell residents by local benefactor Margaret Glyn in 1946.

However, after more than a century and a half of use, the building has now reached the end of its functional life. The ageing wooden structure has been closed, leaving the future of the site in doubt.

Volunteer trustees responsible for the charity have spent recent years working to secure the hall's future. Plans have been developed to demolish the existing building and replace it with a modern facility better suited to contemporary community use. Planning permission for the redevelopment was granted in January 2024.

Fundraising efforts have already attracted strong local backing, with approximately £85,000 raised from community sources. Despite this, trustees say they have only reached around half of the funding required to deliver the project in full.

They now warn that, without additional financial support or new volunteers willing to take the project forward, the consequences could be stark. The land may have to be sold, the charity dissolved, and with it the long-standing legacy of Glyn Hall brought to an end.

Trustees are therefore issuing what they describe as a final appeal to residents, local organisations and potential benefactors to come forward.

"This is a final opportunity to save Glyn Hall for future generations," they say.

Anyone interested in supporting the project or seeking further information is invited to contact trustee Matthew Anderson at [mjranderson64@gmail.com](mailto:mjranderson64@gmail.com).

The future of one of Ewell's longstanding community assets now depends on whether sufficient backing can be secured in the coming months.

Sam Jones - Reporter



Image: Glyn Hall now (Google) and the plan

Related report:

Campaign to save Ewell Village's Glyn Hall



## Friends of Horton Cemetery influence law reform

4 June 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

Related reports:

Epsom and Ewell's MP champion's Friends of Horton Cemetery mission on "Time to Talk Day"

Epsom's Horton Cemetery gets attention of two kinds

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

---

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

4 June 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

4 June 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

*This article is reproduced with the kind permission of Epsom and Ewell History Explorer ([www.eehe.org.uk](http://www.eehe.org.uk)). The original article forms part of EEHE's extensive and richly illustrated archive of local history. Epsom and Ewell Times readers are warmly encouraged to explore the many other fascinating histories available on the site.*

Image source Australian Photographic Agency Collection, State Library of New South Wales CC BY-SA 3.0

Other histories from Epsom and Ewell History Explorer on Epsom and Ewell Times:

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

4 June 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](http://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.

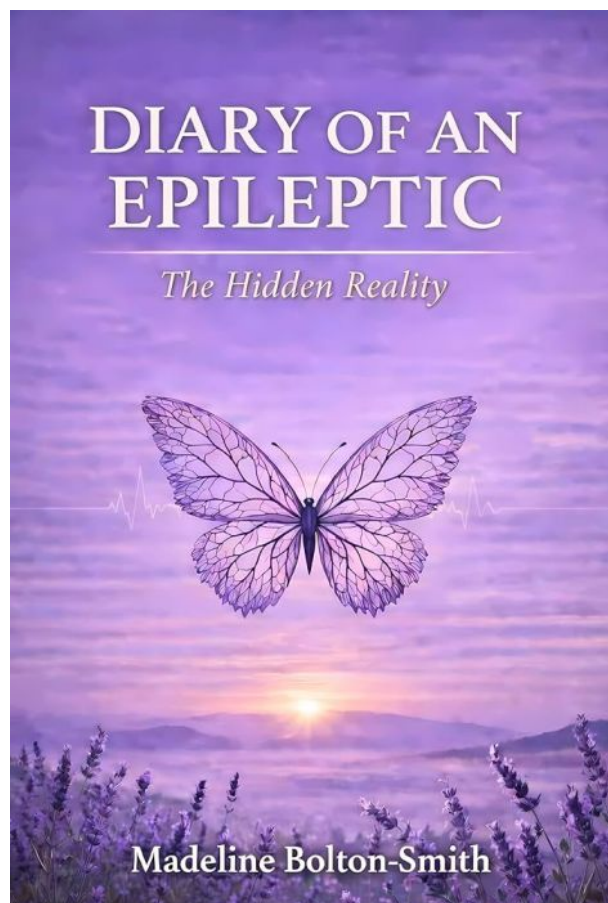
Through *Diary of an Epileptic*, she hopes to contribute to that wider conversation while offering practical reassurance to readers facing similar circumstances.

*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

4 June 2026



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

4 June 2026



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.

*This article is reproduced with permission from the Epsom and Ewell History Explorer (www.eehe.org.uk). The original article, written by Roger Morgan, forms part of EEHE's extensive and richly illustrated archive of local history. EET readers are warmly encouraged to explore the many other fascinating histories available on the site.*

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

4 June 2026



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 Phyliss 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

4 June 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](http://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