

# Surrey's suffragette composer re-imagined in many ways

13 February 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.

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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.

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# 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.

*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

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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 muddled the historical record.

Douglas married Phylliss 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

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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

## British Railways’ 200 year celebration train coming to Epsom

13 February 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

13 February 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

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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

13 February 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

## A snapshot of Romany Gypsy life in Woking

13 February 2026



Written and visual sources for the lived experience of Romany Gypsies in the county are rare so a collection of copy photographs of the Baker family of Sunridge/Sundridge Camp, Old Woking, and a memoir written by Rose Baker (later Burch) recalling her family's life there, make for an extraordinary testimony (reference 10066/1/9). Rose (born 1918) was a twin and one of 13 children of James and Clara Baker. Gems in the collection include a handwritten list of where she and her siblings were born, including in tents, in a meadow by Old Woking cemetery and in 'the little field by the river near the park which is now overgrown' (10066/1/6).Nellie Violet & Rose Baker Jackmans Nursery

The Bakers and other families in the camp worked for Mr Carter at his farm in Kingfield. The work was arduous, and Gypsies provided cheap labour as they were generally not well paid. From the age of 14, Rose worked at Cartbridge Laundry, then at Jackman and Son's Nursery in Egley Road, where some of her sisters were already employed. Annually in September, the family would travel to Hampshire for the hop-picking season. New building byelaws and public health concerns meant that by 1931 Woking Urban District Council compulsorily purchased the privately owned land which the encampment stood on and a year later evicted its nine resident families. The Bakers moved into settled accommodation in Westfield. Rose's son Geoff used her memoir to research his Romany roots and, in the process, collated a whole collection revealing a fascinating insight into their lifestyle. The collection will be a huge help to enquirers tracing their own Gypsy ancestry.

A game of cat and mouse?



This intriguing drawing was discovered among records of Greenfield School, Woking, recently deposited before the school's merger with Hoe Bridge School (10768/1/2/2). The pencil sketch, depicting a cat teacher with a classroom of mice pupils, is captioned, 'But when her Highness is near, Dear Cat you need have no fear'.

Who is the Cat examining the maths paper in her hand, and who is 'her Highness'? Helpfully, though, all the mice are all individually named, including K Green (creator of the artwork) and K Barbier (whose name appears on the maths paper).

The mystery is further deepened by a cryptic poem that accompanies the drawing:

Cat poem

Now look amidst the senior mice,  
Serene and calm Her Royal Highness stands,  
How could you Cat, suggest these mice

Would game and play in little bands.  
Never, never could the Girls' School mice  
Be other than polite and nice  
When such a Highness took command  
And ruled with love that lively band  
Dear Cat, in all humility we you advise  
To show our portrait (we're sure that's wise)  
To that same Royal Highness who here stands  
And say you're sorry - we feel she'll understand.

We think the drawing dates from the early 1940s, as some of the names have been traced on the 1939 Register as born around 1926 to 1927, and were most likely senior pupils, as the poem suggests. This was before the school was purchased by Ockenden Venture founders, Joyce Pearce and Ruth Hicks (in 1948), so we are no closer to identifying 'Cat' and 'Her Royal Highness'. If you can help us solve this enigma, we would love to hear from you!

Surrey History Centre.

Read about many other rich and varied events from Surrey History Centre [HERE](#)

## Epsom & Ewell's French racing twin is a favourite

13 February 2026



The Château de Chantilly has been selected as Monument Préféré des Français 2025 (France's Favourite Monument), surpassing 13 other iconic sites in a national vote. It succeeds the 24 Hours of Le Mans circuit, which won the honour in 2024.

This accolade was conferred through the popular France 3 television programme Le Monument Préféré des Français, presented by Stéphane Bern, which each year invites the public to vote for their favourite heritage site. Stéphane Bern is a well-known French journalist, television and radio presenter, writer and historian. He specialises in European history, royalty and cultural heritage, and is often described in France as the country's "Mr Heritage."

### A heightened spotlight on Chantilly

Epsom and Ewell with Chantilly enjoy a twinning charter and both share a proud equestrian heritage. Chantilly is renowned for its racecourse and celebrated training grounds, Epsom is world-famous for the Derby, a race that has shaped the international thoroughbred calendar for over two centuries. This shared identity as centres of horseracing tradition provides a natural bond between the two towns and further enriches their twinning relationship.

The chateau victory not only amplifies the national and international profile of Chantilly but reinforces its status as an exceptional cultural treasure. The château, owned by the Institut de France, houses the Musée Condé, with the Duke of Aumale's art collection and library as its heart. It is also celebrated for its formal gardens, its expansive park and the remarkable Museum of the Horse, housed in the former great stables.

Since the château was designated "Monument préféré des Français," Stéphane Bern presented a commemorative plaque to Anne Miller, the château's administratrice générale. The French Ministry of Culture highlighted that this distinction honours not just architectural splendour, but the unique legacy bequeathed by the Duke of Aumale, reaffirming the château's role as a living site of art, memory and natural heritage.

### The Duc d'Aumale: A link across the Channel

A key figure tying Chantilly to our locality is Henri, Duc d'Aumale (1822-1897), a French prince, military officer, scholar, bibliophile and art collector.

After the Revolution of 1848 forced the Orléans family into exile, the Duke of Aumale settled in Twickenham, just across the Thames from Epsom, in a notable residence known as Orleans House.

Although the main house was largely demolished in 1926, the Octagon Room and service wing survive as part of the Orleans House Gallery, now a Grade I listed building. During his stay, the Duke built an imposing library and picture gallery adjacent to Orleans House, housing many of his collections. These collections — including masterpieces by Raphael, Rubens and others — were later transferred back to Chantilly upon his death, forming a substantial part of the Musée Condé's holdings under his no-loans rule.

The Duke also had local ties through the birth of his son, François d'Orléans, duc de Guise, born in Twickenham in 1854. Upon his death in 1897, the Duke bequeathed Chantilly, together with its art, library and collections, to the Institut de France, under the condition that it be preserved as a museum of French art and history.

## Twinning, cultural bridges, and local opportunity

The success of Chantilly in this national competition is a proud moment for Epsom & Ewell, reinforcing the value and impact of town-twinning. Twinning is not merely ceremonial — it offers opportunities for cultural exchange, reciprocal visits, shared projects in art, education and heritage, and deeper understanding between communities.

Nigel Collin, Chairman of the Epsom & Ewell Town-Twinning Association, commented:

“We warmly congratulate our colleagues in Chantilly for this well-deserved achievement. Anyone who has visited the Château cannot fail to be amazed, not just by its external splendour, but by the staggering depth of works from the 15th to the 19th century — works you can only see in situ here, thanks to the Duke of Aumale’s strict no-loans condition. It really is well worth a visit, and if any residents are interested in visiting via a Twinning Association group, we will be pleased to advise and assist.”

This announcement may inspire renewed interest in twinning visits, themed excursions focusing on heritage, art or gardens, school exchanges, and collaborative cultural programmes. Epsom & Ewell welcomes ideas for reciprocal exchanges with Chantilly, whether joint exhibitions, lectures, or youth projects.

For further information or to register your interest in a Chantilly visit, please contact the Epsom & Ewell Twinning Association via [contact@epsomtwinning.com](mailto:contact@epsomtwinning.com).

Sam Jones – Reporter



## King Athelstan returns to Kingston

13 February 2026



Podcaster and historian Tom Holland was in Kingston on Thursday 4th September to mark the 1,100th anniversary of the coronation of King Athelstan, regarded as England’s first monarch.

At a ceremony on Platform 1 of Kingston station, Holland unveiled the name “King Athelstan” on one of South Western Railway’s Class 450 trains. The event was staged with Saxon re-enactors, children from King Athelstan Primary School wearing crowns, and a choir from Tiffin School.

The Bishop of Kingston, Martin Gainsborough, offered a blessing for the train. Dignitaries included local MP Sir Ed Davey, the Mayor of Kingston, Cllr Noel Hadjimichael, and representatives from Malmesbury, where Athelstan is buried, and Oldenburg in Germany, twinned with Kingston.

### Remembering England’s first king

Athelstan, the grandson of Alfred the Great, was crowned in Kingston in 925 before becoming known as the first ruler of a united England. While less famous than later monarchs such as William the Conqueror or Elizabeth I, a poll run by *The Rest is History* in 2021 saw him voted England’s “greatest king”.

Kingston played host to the coronation of Athelstan and six other Saxon kings. South Western Railway remains the only operator serving the town, making it a partner in the Kingston 2025 celebrations marking this heritage.

### Voices from the ceremony

Tom Holland said: “Who better to have a train named after him than Athelstan, the great Anglo-Saxon king who first set England on track to becoming a united kingdom?”

Peter Williams, Customer and Commercial Director at South Western Railway, added: “As it travels around the network, we hope our train will inspire customers to discover more about Athelstan’s reign, and his coronation in Kingston 1,100 years ago.”

Sir Ed Davey, MP for Kingston and Surbiton and Leader of the Liberal Democrats, described the event as “a little unusual but absolutely in the spirit of the occasion”.

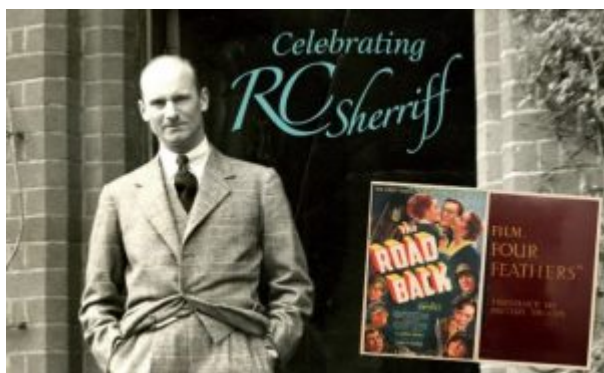
Mayor Noel Hadjimichael called it “a wonderful part of our six-month festival of past, present and future across the royal borough”.

### Part of Kingston 2025

The naming ceremony formed part of wider Kingston 2025 cultural celebrations. Later in the day, commemorations continued at All Saints Church, the site of Athelstan’s coronation.

## Surrey to mark 50 years since the death of playwright R.C. Sherriff

13 February 2026



This November marks the 50th anniversary of the death of **Robert Cedric Sherriff (1896-1975)**, the Surrey-born playwright and screenwriter best remembered for his First World War play *Journey's End*.

Sherriff, who attended Kingston Grammar School, originally worked as an insurance clerk before serving with distinction on the Western Front. His experiences in the trenches shaped *Journey's End* (1928), the searing drama set in a British officers’ dugout during the last year of the war.

The play, which launched the career of a young Laurence Olivier – barely 21 at the time – was first staged at the Apollo Theatre in London. It became one of the defining anti-war works of its age and continues to be revived on stage and screen nearly a century later.

But Sherriff’s talents extended far beyond the theatre. He went on to become the **highest-paid English scriptwriter in Hollywood**, penning screenplays for classics such as *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1939), *The Four Feathers* (1939), and *The Dam Busters* (1955). His work combined dramatic structure with cinematic flair, leaving an enduring legacy on both sides of the Atlantic.

To mark the anniversary, **Surrey History Centre** is hosting a special event in Woking on **Saturday 8 November (10.30am-12.15pm)**. The programme includes:

- **Dr David Cottis - “RC Sherriff and the Well-Made Screenplay”**  
A look at how Sherriff brought stagecraft into cinema, illustrated with material from the Centre’s archives.
- **Roland Wales - “Shirkers or Spies? RC Sherriff in Wartime Hollywood”**  
Exploring Sherriff’s move to America during the Second World War, where British expatriates were accused in some quarters of being shirkers at home and even suspected spies abroad. Despite this, their patriotic films resonated strongly with American audiences, helping shape wartime morale.

The event will be held both **in person at the Surrey History Centre, Woking (130 Goldsworth Road, GU21 6ND)**, and online via Zoom. Tickets cost **£6** and must be booked in advance. Book [HERE](#)

For those interested in Surrey’s literary heritage, the occasion provides a rare chance to revisit the remarkable career of a local man who made a global impact – from Kingston schoolboy to West End dramatist, Hollywood insider, and chronicler of the war generation.

For more news and events from Surrey History Centre [CLICK HERE](#)

## Epsom’s Parish Church Marks 200 Years

13 February 2026



This September, Epsom pauses to celebrate the 200th anniversary of its parish church, the Church of St Martin of Tours. For two centuries the building has stood at the centre of town life — a place of worship, history, and identity for Epsom and Ewell.

The anniversary weekend will feature a range of special events. On Sunday 14 September at 3pm, historian Peter Ross will deliver a talk entitled *Dining with James and Jane: Eating at Home with the Georgians*. Drawing on the vivid diaries of Norfolk clergyman James Woodforde (1758-1802), who recorded every meal he ate, and the letters and novels of Jane Austen, Ross will reveal the food, manners, and household rhythms of Georgian England. His illustrated lecture will include images of paintings, prints, cookery books, and everyday domestic objects, offering a glimpse into the lives of our Georgian forebears. The afternoon will conclude with tea, followed by a service of Choral Evensong.

### A stone laid in 1825

On 19 May 1825, the Rev. Joseph Darby, vicar of Epsom, laid the first stone of a new parish church. The medieval church that had stood for centuries was by then both too small and in disrepair. A meeting in 1823 resolved — after some debate — to rebuild. The sturdy medieval tower at the north-west corner was spared, along with the ancient font and wall memorials, but the remainder was swept away.

The contractors, William Blofield of London, working to plans by architect Mr Hatchard of Pimlico, expanded the footprint of the building. Side aisles were widened and lengthened, the west front was advanced, and new staircases and galleries provided for greater capacity. The rebuilt church could now seat around 1,120 parishioners.

At the stone-laying ceremony, Rev. Darby was presented with a handsome silver trowel, inscribed to mark the moment. Sadly, the trowel has since been lost, but the act it commemorated continues to shape the heart of Epsom today.

### Victorian Epsom: railways and renewal

Within a generation, however, Epsom was changing again. The arrival of the railway in the 1840s transformed the town from a quiet settlement of around 3,300 people into a rapidly growing commuter hub. Two lines, one from London Bridge and another from Waterloo, brought new residents and prosperity. By the mid-nineteenth century, the population had more than doubled.

The parish church once again felt the strain. Inadequate for the growing congregation, its galleries deemed unsightly, and its facilities cramped, it became the subject of another ambitious rebuilding plan. The vicar at the time, Rev. Waldegrave Bainbridge-Bell, rallied support from influential local figures, including Lord Rosebery and Sir Thomas Bucknill MP.

There was even talk that Epsom Parish Church might become the cathedral of a proposed new Diocese of Guildford. With such aspirations in mind, the architects Nicholson and Corlette were commissioned to draw up a design of “cathedral proportions”.

### The 1908 extension

In August 1907, the foundation stone for the grand new east end was laid. A year later, on St Martin’s Day (11 November 1908), the Bishop of Winchester consecrated the new extension. The project cost £13,000 — a significant sum at the time — and gave the church much of the form it has today.

Not all of the plans could be realised: financial pressures meant the most ambitious elements of the Nicholson and Corlette design were never completed. But the east end remains one of Surrey’s most impressive ecclesiastical interiors, a testimony both to the ambition of its builders and to Epsom’s growth in the early twentieth century.

### What remains today

Today, three key layers of history meet in the building:

- The medieval tower, the oldest surviving structure in Epsom.
- The 1825 nave and west end, the fruit of the first great rebuilding.
- The 1908 east end, marking the town’s Edwardian expansion.

Together, they tell a story not only of the parish church but of the town itself: medieval market village, Georgian spa settlement, Victorian commuter suburb, and Edwardian provincial centre.

### Looking to the future

While this year’s anniversary recalls the laying of the 1825 foundation stone, there are further milestones ahead. In just

three years' time, the church will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its great east end. That event, too, will provide an opportunity for reflection and celebration.

For now, parishioners and townsfolk alike are invited to join in the September festivities — to mark 200 years since the church we know today began to rise from the foundations of its medieval predecessor.

As one of Epsom's most enduring landmarks, St Martin's stands not only as a house of worship but also as a witness to the town's history. Its tower and walls have looked down on 200 years of change. In celebrating this anniversary, the community also honours the generations who built, rebuilt, and preserved Epsom's parish church at the heart of civic life.

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## Two new Epsom and Ewell virtual day trips unveiled

13 February 2026



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council has launched two new inclusive tours, part of their *Virtual Day Trips* series, in partnership with Whistlestop Tours. These tours explore Epsom and Ewell, shining a spotlight on the history and cultural heritage of the borough.

The Virtual Day Trips can be watched online for free – from the comfort of home, a school classroom, or in shared community spaces. They include film and audio, with immersive resource packs and memory boxes also available to bring the tours to life.

The Epsom and Ewell Virtual Day Trips were funded by the Arts, Culture and Heritage UKSPF 2024/25 allocation. They sit alongside the *Nonsuch Formal Gardens* tour produced in 2024.

This project is part of the council's strategy to widen access to local history, allowing people to engage in a way that is comfortable to them.

The tours last around 30 minutes. Highlights include:

- Architectural elements from Nonsuch Palace near the Assembly Rooms in Epsom town centre
- Meeting residents and hearing about their passions, from throwing pottery to playing the bandura, the national instrument of Ukraine
- A rare peek inside the Watch House on Ewell High Street
- Ghost stories from local residents
- A behind-the-scenes tour with the Epsom Beekeepers Association

Councillor Clive Woodbridge, Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said:

"I have lived in the borough of Epsom & Ewell for many years, and I found these tours completely fascinating. I thoroughly recommend them, whether you are new to the borough, a long-time resident like me, or someone who is interested in the local area – they can be enjoyed by everyone.

These two new inclusive Virtual Day Trips show our commitment to increasing access to our borough's rich history and cultural heritage. They will help people really get to know our fantastic local area."

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## Virtual Day Trips

Explore here:

Epsom

Ewell

The first Virtual Day Trip produced was Nonsuch Park.

Digital tours are also available on Bloomberg Connects:

- Horton Country Park Local Nature Reserve
- Nonsuch Park

The Virtual Day Trips have been developed by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council in partnership with Whistlestop Arts, Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell Library, Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network, Epsom Beekeepers Association, Parkinson's Choir, Walk & Talk 4 Men – Surrey, Epsom Pots, and local residents.

### About Whistlestop Arts

Whistlestop Arts is run by two creatives:

- *Annalees Lim* – a freelance artist with extensive community arts experience, particularly in disability arts and accessible projects. She is also an illustrator and children's activity book author.
- *Luna Russell* – a maker and arts facilitator passionate about the positive impact of the arts. She has managed projects for Chichester Festival Theatre, Chichester Cathedral, Surrey Arts and Horsham District Council, as well as leading community arts programmes.

### Whistlestop Arts Virtual Day Trips

Virtual Day Trips are presented by Annalees and Luna, who meet local people and share their stories. Each trip includes films, podcasts and craft activities.

Full-length films are designed for use in group settings such as care homes and day centres, with built-in pause points for activities. Resource packs are available to enhance the experience.

For more information, visit: [Whistlestop Arts – Virtual Day Trips](#)

Luna Russell and Annalees Lim beside Emily Davison statue in Epsom. Credit **Whistlestop Arts**

## Epsom commemorates VJ day

13 February 2026



St Martin's Church, Epsom, was filled on Friday 15th August as the borough came together to mark the 80th anniversary of VJ Day – the end of the Second World War in the Far East. The service, organised by the Royal British Legion's Epsom and Ewell branch, brought together civic leaders, veterans, families, choirs and the wider community to commemorate those who served and those who never came home.

The service was led by Revd Nick Parish, who in his opening prayer set the tone:

"God, our Father, in the dying and rising of your Son, Jesus Christ, you have brought life and salvation out of cruelty and death. We mark VJ Day in gratitude for the courage of the allied forces who suffered for freedom in the Far East campaign, and in sorrow for all that hinders the coming of your kingdom of peace. Give us wisdom to learn from the bitter memories of war and hearts that long for the unity of all nations."

### A personal touch from local families

Among the most moving contributions came from Mrs Sheila Carlson-Berry, who read extracts from her late father Douglas Fletcher's letters home from Burma. Fletcher, who had volunteered for the RAF at 19, wrote more than 250 letters to his sweetheart Sylvie during his service.

From October 1944 he wrote with cautious optimism:

"I suppose by the time you receive this European war will be just about finished. What a wonderful thought. It must make the people at home very happy... loved ones at home free from all danger. That, of course, is the main reason for our joy. The other is that now we can have the men and materials out here to put an end to this."

In another letter, he reflected on the "forgotten" nature of the Burma campaign:

"Most people don't realise there's a war on out here. It's only the people who have someone here that understand what is happening. The children have suffered most. It will take years to erase horrible memories from their minds. Man's inhumanity to man – a terrible war, isn't it?"

By August 1945, as the atomic bombs fell on Japan, Fletcher wrote with relief:

"So it's all over. Hard to believe, isn't it? It came so suddenly, but there it is. It will make things so much easier... Yes, the atomic bomb is a terrible weapon, but I think we have it to thank for the Jap surrender... I sincerely hope it will be the last war on this earth. War is too terrible a business. So many innocent people have to suffer."

Sheila told the congregation: "As you probably guessed, Douglas is my dad. Sylvie, my mum. He never forgot his

comrades. Each Remembrance Day, I went with him to Westminster, and he cried as he planted a cross in the garden for his friend and pilot, Godwin Scudamore, who didn't make it home."

## The stories of Epsom's fallen

Cllr Dr Graham Jones MBE and the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael Molyneux, read researched accounts of four Epsom men who lost their lives in the Far East campaign.

- **Sergeant Jack Cannon**, Royal Artillery, died 28 February 1944 aged 30 at Imphal, India: "Jack married Nora Rush in 1940, and a year later their son Anthony was born. After just a year with his family, Jack was sent to India... He was killed in action during a Japanese attack and later interred at the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in Imphal. His widow Nora requested the inscription: *'To a beautiful life came a sudden end, and he died as he lived, everyone's friend.'*"
- **Corporal Lionel William Murray**, Dorset Regiment, killed at the Battle of Kohima, 4 May 1944, aged 28: "Before the war he lived with his mother in Langley Vale. He was evacuated from Dunkirk, then sent to India to train in jungle warfare. At Kohima he fought in bitter hand-to-hand combat and was killed in action. His gravestone reads: *'In loving memory of a beloved son and brother. Rest in peace.'*"
- **Lance Bombardier Alfred William Cates**, Royal Artillery, died of cholera 26 July 1943 aged 42: "Stationed in Singapore, he was taken prisoner in February 1942 and sent to work on the notorious Thailand-Burma Death Railway. His widow Emma chose the words: *'So young, so calm, so bright, I bid you, my dearest one, goodnight.'*"
- **Noel Seymour**, RAF wireless operator, died 14 October 1943 aged 21: "Taken prisoner in Singapore, he too was forced to work on the Burma Railway, where some 30 prisoners died every day. Noel was one of them. He lies in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand, and his name is remembered on the war memorial in this very church."

## Tributes from today's leaders

Helen Maguire MP for Epsom and Ewell, whose grandfather had served in Burma, spoke of both the past and her own military service: "Those who served in the Burma campaign were referred to as the Forgotten Army, and today we remember them and we honour them... My grandfather fought in the Battle of Kohima, a brutal and decisive turning point in the war. Like many who served there, he never spoke of his experiences, but it was clear the war stayed with him for the rest of his life. I remember him today with pride, gratitude and honour."

Maguire linked her own military service in Bosnia and Iraq to the experiences of those remembered:

"War is cruel and it affects innocent people. It's something civilians should never have to live through. Today, I remember my grandfather and those he served with. I remember those who didn't come home, and I remember too the lasting impact of service on families, on lives and on future generations. We give thanks for peace and pray for an end to wars."

## Community effort

Barb Warwick, principal organiser with the Epsom RBL, later thanked the many contributors, from choirs and standard bearers to the volunteers who served over 100 cups of tea and cake in St Martin's Hall. She acknowledged the "wonderful trumpeter Mr Dennis Sexton" for sounding the Last Post, and Tom Davey representing 135 Squadron.

Warwick reflected that this was "almost certainly the last service of its kind" and praised those who helped plan the event, especially John Rogers and Revd Nick Parish: "You did them proud."

## Remembering the Forgotten Army

The commemoration at St Martin's - once known as the "Burma Star church" - brought together personal memory, civic duty, and community remembrance. The letters of Douglas Fletcher, the stories of Cannon, Murray, Cates and Seymour, and the testimonies of descendants and leaders ensured that those from Epsom who served in the Far East will not be forgotten.

As the exhortation reminded the packed congregation: *"We will remember them."*

You can watch the full service on this video link: [Epsom and Ewell VJ Day Commemoration](#)

Image: Barb Warwick of Royal British Legion Epsom and Ewell the principal organiser of the event.

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# What has kept us well in Surrey through the ages?

13 February 2026



**How have people in Surrey looked after their wellbeing through the centuries — and what can we learn from them today?** That's the question behind a new year-long heritage and wellbeing initiative backed by the National Lottery.

**It's Not Your Birthday But... (INYBB)**, a Surrey-based arts and social impact organisation, has been awarded £99,781 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver *What Keeps Us Well*, in partnership with the Surrey History Centre (SHC). The project runs from **August 2025 to July 2026**.

Drawing on six miles of historic records held at SHC — ranging from medieval manuscripts to community newsletters — the project will explore how people across Surrey have maintained wellbeing through food, exercise, creativity, connection, and community.

INYBB's artistic team will collaborate with archivists and three local partner groups to deliver the programme:

- **The Halow Project**, supporting neurodiverse young people in Guildford and Woking
- **Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum**, promoting inclusion and cultural understanding
- **Surrey Youth Groups**, including LGBTQ+ youth, carers and neurodiverse teens in Woking and Knaphill

Together, they will develop:

- **36 creative workshops**
- **Training and community events** at the Surrey History Centre
- **A co-created exhibition** showcasing historic sources and new creative responses
- **A short documentary film**
- **A published anthology** of written work
- **A digital wellness guide**
- **An open call for artists and writers** to create new work inspired by archive material

The project aims to reach over **46,500 people**, with a strong emphasis on engaging communities currently underrepresented in heritage activities.

"At a time when mental health challenges are increasing across our communities, this project will highlight how stories from the past can inspire wellness today," said an INYBB spokesperson.

### How to Get Involved

- **Volunteers** are invited to help with exhibitions, research and more
- **Venues** (libraries, community centres, health hubs) are encouraged to host the free exhibition
- **Artists and writers** will be invited to respond creatively to archive materials through an open call launching this autumn

To register interest or find out more, visit [itsnotyourbirthdaybut.com](https://itsnotyourbirthdaybut.com) or follow @itsnotyourbirthdaybut on social media.

## About INYBB

**It's Not Your Birthday But... (INYBB)** is a creative organisation working across Surrey and the South East to support wellbeing through arts and social connection. It runs participatory projects that explore identity, place, and belonging — often in partnership with community groups and public bodies. The name reflects the idea that celebration, support and attention shouldn't be limited to birthdays alone — everyone deserves moments of care and connection, every day.

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

Image: The Centurions group was founded at a meeting of long-distance walking enthusiasts held on 11 May 1911. Courtesy SCC