

Epsom's infamous murders

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Epsom has witnessed several notable murder cases throughout the 20th century. These incidents, though tragic, have become part of the town's history.

Epsom is best known for its racing heritage, Georgian elegance and green Surrey charm — but it also holds its share of darker history. Between 1901 and 2000, the town was the site of several shocking murders that unsettled its sense of peace and left a permanent imprint on local memory. Here are three of the most notable.

The 1919 Epsom Riot and the Death of Station Sergeant Thomas Green

On the night of **17 June 1919**, only seven months after the Armistice, Epsom found itself in the grip of a riot that had little precedent in the town's history. The trouble came not from locals, but from **hundreds of Canadian soldiers** stationed at nearby Woodcote Park Camp. Frustrated by delays in repatriation after the end of World War I, the men — many of them battle-hardened veterans — were increasingly restless.

After one of their own was arrested during an earlier pub disturbance, a crowd of between **300 and 800 soldiers marched on Epsom Police Station**, demanding his release. Violence broke out, and **Station Sergeant Thomas Green**, a 51-year-old veteran officer and father of five, was struck on the head by a wooden post and seriously injured. He died the next day in hospital.

The aftermath shocked the country. Seven Canadian soldiers were tried at the Surrey Assizes. Though the **murder charge was dropped** and replaced by manslaughter, to avoid the risk of the diplomatic nightmare of execution, they were convicted only of **riot** and received sentences of **one year in prison**. But due to diplomatic sensitivities — and the fact that Britain was hosting Canada's forces — most served just a few months before being quietly released.

To this day, Green is commemorated locally. A **blue plaque** marks the site of the incident, and his grave lies in **Ashley Road Cemetery**. The riot remains a rare example of post-war military unrest spilling onto English streets — and one of the town's earliest 20th-century murders.

The 1930 Horton Lane Murder of Agnes Kesson

In June 1930, the peaceful lanes around Horton — home to several psychiatric hospitals at the time — became the scene of a macabre discovery. The **body of 20-year-old Agnes Kesson**, a young Scottish woman working as a waitress, was found dumped in a ditch beside Horton Lane.

Agnes had been living in Epsom while engaged to a man named **Robert Duncan Harper**, a local labourer with a reputation and a nickname: "**Scotch Bob**." Initial suspicion naturally fell on Harper, especially as they were last seen together, and witnesses had allegedly overheard arguments. However, police found **no conclusive evidence**, and Harper was released.

Despite inquiries, door-to-door searches and press appeals, **no one was ever charged** with the killing. The murder gripped the town — not only because of its brutality but because of the location: Horton Lane was a route many walked daily, close to the sprawling mental hospital estates that added their own shadows to Epsom's identity.

Though largely forgotten now, the case remains **unsolved**, and Kesson lies in an unmarked grave. Local historians continue to investigate the files, hoping for fresh insight into what was then one of Surrey's most talked-about unsolved crimes.

The 1970 Murder of Ann Smith

On the morning of January 28, 1970, two stable lads from Treadwell Stables, Noel Flanagan and Roger Harris, were exercising horses on Epsom Downs when they discovered the body of a young woman in a ditch near a footpath between Downs Road and Burgh Heath Road. The victim was partially clothed, and her tights and underwear were found nearby, but her shoes, handbag, and money were missing. She had been strangled, battered, and possibly raped before being transported to Epsom and dumped in the ditch.

The woman was later identified as 20-year-old Ann Smith (née Malone), who had been living in Crokerton Road, Tooting. She was separated from her 19-year-old husband, Thomas James Smith, and had a young son. A team of 40 detectives, led by Detective Chief Superintendent Ken Etheridge, investigated the case. Initially, police considered links to other cases, such as the Hammersmith Nude Murders and the Yorkshire Ripper investigation, but these connections were eventually dismissed.

Despite extensive efforts, the murder of Ann Smith remains unsolved. The case is documented in the National Archives under the reference: "A SMITH: victim of unsolved murder. Body discovered in a ditch on Epsom Downs on 28 January 1970."

The 1998 Murder of Lee Harris

The fourth is also the most chilling. In the early hours of **4 September 1998**, **Lee Harris**, a 30-year-old man, was asleep in his ground-floor flat on **Rutland Close**, near Longmead in Epsom. Around 1:30 a.m., three masked men forced entry. In a brutal attack, Harris was **stabbed multiple times and shot in the chest**. His girlfriend, who was also home, was unharmed but left traumatised.

Neighbours reported hearing screams and a car speeding away. Police said it appeared to be a **targeted attack**. Harris had no known serious criminal ties, and his family maintained he had no enemies. Despite a large manhunt, interviews with over 100 people, and ballistic and forensic analysis, **no suspects were ever identified**.

The murder of Lee Harris remains **officially unsolved**. It sent shockwaves through a community unused to such violence and still resonates today as one of Epsom's most disturbing modern crimes.

Final Thoughts

These four cases span different eras and different motives — military unrest, intimate violence, and possibly gang-related vengeance. But they share a haunting link: **none of the perpetrators were ever convicted of murder**. Each case remains incomplete, a story without justice.

Image: Sergeant Green's funeral, Epsom 1919 **public domain**