EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

3rd September 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

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ISSN 2753-2771

Heritage doors open across Epsom and Ewell

2 September 2026

Historic buildings, forgotten stories and rarely seen corners of Surrey will be brought to life when Heritage Open Days return from Friday 11th to Sunday 20th September.

The annual festival offers free access to historic places, guided walks, exhibitions and talks. This year's theme, "Everyday Histories", celebrates the lives, work and experiences of people whose stories may not always feature in traditional accounts of the past.

Among the many events taking place across Surrey are a dozen opportunities to explore the heritage of Epsom and Ewell, ranging from the history of the borough's spa and racecourse to Ewell's buildings, local currency and the lives of thousands of patients once treated in Epsom's psychiatric hospitals.

Remembering the 9,000 at Horton Cemetery

A particular focus of the local programme will be Horton Cemetery – 9,000 People Remembered, taking place on Saturday 12th September from 10am to 4pm.

Around 9,000 former patients of Epsom's cluster of five psychiatric hospitals were buried in Horton Cemetery between 1899 and 1955. Most lie in unmarked graves and, for decades, their individual identities and life stories were largely forgotten.

The Friends of Horton Cemetery have been working to restore those identities through historical and family research. Visitors will be able to meet researchers and volunteers, explore displays, listen to audio material and learn about some of the people buried there.

The event will be held on land adjacent to the cemetery in Hook Road. The cemetery itself remains inaccessible, but free parking will be available close to the event. Admission is free and advance booking is not required, although the organisers expect the site to become busier later in the day.

A linked event, The History of Horton Asylum and Horton Cemetery, will run at The Horton Arts Centre in Haven Way from 10am to 4pm on the same day.

The Grade II-listed arts centre occupies the former chapel of Horton Hospital. Its exhibitions, presentations and tours will examine the history of Epsom's five psychiatric hospitals and the lives of the patients and staff who lived and worked within them. Researchers will also be available to help visitors investigate possible family connections.

Local events across the ten days

The borough's programme begins on Friday 11th September, when St Martin of Tours Church in Church Street, Epsom, will open from 9.30am to 1pm. The parish church will also be open on most days during the festival:

- Saturday 12th September, 10am to 5pm
- Sunday 13th September, noon to 6pm
- Monday 14th to Friday 18th September, 9.30am to 1pm
- Sunday 20th September, noon to 6pm

On Sunday 13th September, a guided Epsom Salts and Spa Walk will leave the historic Assembly Rooms in the High Street at 11am. The walk will explore how Epsom's mineral waters transformed the town into a fashionable spa destination. Advance booking is required.

Ewell Court House, in Ewell Court Avenue, will welcome visitors between 10am and 2pm that day, offering an opportunity to discover more about the history and architecture of the house. No booking is required.

Also on Sunday, the Service Wing Museum at Nonsuch Park will open from noon until 4pm. The museum occupies part of the surviving service wing of the former Nonsuch Mansion and contains displays relating to the history of the estate and the lost Tudor Palace of Nonsuch. Admission is free without advance booking.

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Bourne Hall will host Everyday Histories in Worcester Park from the Iron Age to the Computer Age at 2pm on Monday 14th September. The talk will follow the development of the area through archaeological discoveries, changing communities and more recent technological history. Booking is required.

On Tuesday 15th September, former professional jockey Caroline Baldock will lead Life on the Downs, a guided walk around the Derby course at Epsom Downs Racecourse. The walk begins at 10am and is expected to last approximately 90 minutes. Places are limited and must be booked in advance.

Lost Buildings of Epsom will be the subject of a talk at Bourne Hall at 2pm on Wednesday 16th September. It will recall notable local buildings that have disappeared through redevelopment, demolition or changing uses. Advance booking is required.

Two events follow on Thursday 17th September. Ewell Village, People and Places is a guided walk leaving Bourne Hall at 10am, while Token Coins in Ewell and Epsom, at Bourne Hall Museum at 2pm, will explore the tokens issued by local traders when official coinage was in short supply. Both events require booking.

The local programme concludes on Saturday 19th September when Ewell Castle School opens its doors to visitors from noon until 3pm. The school is celebrating its centenary, having been founded in 1926 when H R Budgell acquired the Castle and opened a school for an initial intake of 40 boys. Advance booking is required.

All Heritage Open Days events are free, but capacity is limited for several of the guided walks and talks. Visitors should book promptly where required and check the individual listings before travelling, as arrangements can change.

The full Surrey Heritage Open Days programme and event search provides details of events across the county, including opening times, accessibility information and booking arrangements.

Sam Jones – Reporter

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