

When the Rolling Stones rolled into Epsom – twice

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Before the stadium tours, private jets and worldwide fame, five young rhythm-and-blues musicians performed on a temporary floor laid over the swimming pool at Epsom Baths Hall. More than six decades later, as the Rolling Stones celebrate another chart-topping album, local history reveals that the band visited Epsom not once, but twice.

The Rolling Stones have returned to the top of the British album chart with *Foreign Tongues*, released on 10 July. It is the band's 25th studio album and their 15th to reach number one in the UK—putting them level with the Beatles and one behind record-holder Robbie Williams.

That remarkable longevity offers an opportunity to look back to two winter Saturday nights in Epsom, when Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Bill Wyman and Charlie Watts were still climbing towards stardom.

A swimming pool became a concert hall

Epsom Municipal Baths opened in East Street on 15 March 1939. The £65,000 complex had been designed from the outset to serve two very different purposes: swimming during the warmer months and public entertainment during the winter.

Its main pool was 100 feet long and 35 feet wide, with galleries seating 412 people. For dances, concerts, boxing and theatrical performances, a moveable maple floor supported by tubular scaffolding was erected over the water. A stage, lighting system, microphone and record turntable completed the transformation. The converted hall was licensed to accommodate as many as 1,396 people for music, dancing and public meetings.

It must have produced an unusual atmosphere: a rock-and-roll audience gathered on boards above the drained or concealed pool, surrounded by tiled walls, diving boards and the acoustics of a municipal swimming bath.

After the Second World War, the Baths Hall became one of Epsom's principal social venues, hosting dances, boxing, orchestral performances and visiting entertainers. The Epsom and Ewell History Explorer describes the Rolling Stones' 1963 engagement as a sold-out highlight for which the band received a fee of £60.

Saturday 14 December 1963

The best-documented Stones appearance took place on **Saturday 14 December 1963**.

“Star Rhythm Blues Time with the Rolling Stones”

The publicity picked out the band's two records, *Come On* and *I Wanna Be Your Man*, and advertised an appearance by supporting group **The Presidents**, described as “that ever popular attraction”. Dancing and music were scheduled from 8pm until 11.30pm. Tickets cost five shillings and sixpence in advance or six shillings and sixpence at the door, with reduced rates offered for parties.

The instruction to “get your tickets early and avoid disappointment” proved well judged if the History Explorer's record of a sell-out is correct.

A surviving business trail also corroborates the engagement. Christie's has catalogued an Eric Easton Ltd performance contract for the Rolling Stones at Epsom Baths Hall among a collection of early Stones agreements covering venues in and around London during late 1963. Eric Easton was then managing the group with Andrew Loog Oldham.

The Epsom booking came at a fascinating point in the band's ascent. They were no longer an unknown club act, but neither had they become the international institution familiar today.

On the chart dated 11 December 1963, three days before the concert, *I Wanna Be Your Man* stood at number 16. It moved to number 15 the following week and eventually reached number 12. Their self-titled debut album had not yet appeared; it would enter the albums chart in April 1964 and spend 12 weeks at number one.

Thus, Epsom caught the Stones in the narrow interval between their first taste of chart success and their transformation into one of Britain's biggest bands.

Back again four weeks later

Concert chronologies reveal something overlooked in the familiar local account: the Rolling Stones returned to Epsom Baths only four weeks later, on **Saturday 11 January 1964**.

The second appearance is listed in detailed Stones performance records as an “extracurricular gig”—a separate engagement fitted around the band’s first major tour of 1964. Their schedule at the time was punishing. They performed two shows at Walthamstow’s Granada Theatre on 10 January, played Epsom the following evening, and then gave two more shows at the Granada in Tooting on 12 January.

They were recording at the same relentless pace. On 10 January—the day before returning to Epsom—the band worked at Regent Sound Studios on *Honest I Do*, *I’m a King Bee* and an early version of *Not Fade Away*, before travelling to Walthamstow for the evening performances.

Their chart fortunes were still improving. *I Wanna Be Your Man* was at number 15 during the week of the second Epsom appearance and rose to its number 12 peak on the chart dated 15 January.

Contemporary touring accounts estimate that the Stones travelled more than 5,000 miles during this period, playing clubs, colleges, ballrooms, cinemas and halls across Britain. The Epsom concert was one of several additional ballroom engagements squeezed between the formal package-tour performances.

No dependable set list has yet emerged for either Epsom show. The December poster establishes that *Come On* and *I Wanna Be Your Man* were central to the promotion, while the band’s contemporary touring repertoire included blues, rhythm-and-blues and Chuck Berry numbers. It would, however, be unsafe to present any reconstructed list as the exact programme heard at Epsom.

Before the world knew their names

The contrast with the present could hardly be greater.

In December 1963, the Stones were travelling from town to town, earning comparatively modest appearance fees and promoting two singles. Their audience in Epsom paid a few shillings to see them in a converted public swimming bath.

Within months, their first album would displace the Beatles’ *With the Beatles* at the top of the UK chart. Their first British number-one single, *It’s All Over Now*, followed in the summer of 1964. The tours, television appearances and scenes of mass excitement then spread far beyond Britain.

Yet the five musicians who appeared in Epsom were already the classic early Stones: Jagger at the microphone, Richards and Jones on guitars, Wyman on bass and Watts behind the drums. Brian Jones and Charlie Watts are no longer alive, while Mick Jagger and Keith Richards—then barely out of their teens—remain at the centre of a band topping the album chart in 2026.

The hall has gone, but the night remains

Epsom Baths Hall continued to host entertainment after the Stones, including a performance by Genesis in 1972. Its popularity eventually declined as alternative venues opened and leisure habits changed. The hall closed in 1989; the original baths complex was demolished in 2001 and replaced by the present Rainbow Leisure Centre.

Nothing visible at the modern centre readily tells visitors that one of the most famous bands in the world once performed there—twice—on a wooden floor constructed above the municipal pool.

What is still missing are the human memories: who queued at the Baths Hall box office, who danced at the front, what the band sounded like through the hall’s public-address system, and whether anyone kept a ticket, photograph or autograph.

Epsom and Ewell Times would be delighted to hear from readers who attended either concert—or whose parents, relatives or friends remembered the Rolling Stones’ two visits to Epsom Baths.

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Lionel Blackman