

Epsom Heritage Trail

GUIDE I



*A walking trail
highlighting the
heritage of Epsom*



epsom **C**ivic **S**ociety

Shaping the Future, Safeguarding the Past

Epsom Civic Society is for all who care about their surroundings and wish to change them for the better whilst protecting the heritage

EPSOM HERITAGE TRAIL

GUIDE I

*Epsom came into existence as a Saxon settlement, probably in the fifth or sixth century AD; it lies close to Stane Street, the Roman road between London and Chichester. It is mentioned as Evesham in the Domesday Book and continued as a small agricultural community until the end of the Middle Ages. Early in the 17th century medicinal water was identified in a well on the Common and, with the relaxation of social constraints on the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 under Charles II, the quiet village with convenient access from London became a fashionable spa. The resulting growth focussed on the meadowland to the west, which encouraged the further development of our High Street area which already existed in the late 15th century. The new buildings were linked to the Parish Church and the old village by a road called The Parade, at one time known as The Church Parade. Little now remains of that village which centred around **St Martin's Church(21)**, but Church Street was developed by the building of several large residences for wealthy owners in the late 17th and 18th centuries. Taking the two centres of Epsom's heritage as the High Street and Church Street, the following notes are intended as a guide to what has survived from the past and can still be seen today.*

We start at the **Clock Tower (1)**, the best-known local landmark, and finish at **St Martin's Church (21)**. Many of the properties mentioned along the way are considered of sufficient architectural or historical interest to be listed Grade II or II*. The Clock Tower was built in 1848, just before new forms of local government were introduced; it replaced the Watch House, an older and smaller tower containing the lock-up, with a pair of stocks standing outside. The western half of the High Street is a Conservation Area: it widens out where a large pond stood just west of the tower. This was drained in 1854 and fortunately never built over.



Clock Tower

Looking across to the north side of the High Street, Nos 94-98 are early 18th century with No 92, also 18th century, tucked in behind them. In the 19th century, No 96 was the post office and along with No 98 it has been a restaurant for many years. No 100 is early 18th century with an unusual 19th century metal standard outside denoting its business. No 112 is a late 17th century building surviving unexpectedly in the middle of a modern store complex, on the site where an Odeon cinema provided entertainment from 1937 to 1971. Nos 122/124 are 18th century and lie at the end of the High Street, as shown by the nameplate high up on the wall. Next door is No 2 West Street; a 19th century

building, known for its unusual inside cash desk. No 4, **The Marquis of Granby pub (2)**, is 18th century with a 19th century porch. No 6, a former workshop, is early 19th century, but Nos 8-10, built around 1698, is now a pair of houses with steps up to the door but originally was a single property with replica facades. Going past the modern office block and across Station Approach, we come to No 26 with its decorated gable end. This combined dwelling, works and shop built around 1870, was Epsom's first reinforced concrete building.

Crossing over West Street to its south side, we find the row comprising Nos 1-15; mostly these are conversions of 18th century houses, but Nos 9 and 11 are late 17th century. Then rounding the corner past No 15 we come to two large early 18th century houses: the Old Manor House (never actually a manor house) and the **White House (3)**. The adjacent British Legion Club is late 18th century or early 19th century. There is another 'White House' in Waterloo Road in which C.J. Swete in his Handbook of Epsom states that the Prince of Wales, later King George IV, along with Mrs Fitzherbert, lived for a time.

As we return to the High Street, around the corner to the right into South Street we pass the Albion Terrace (street numbers here continue on from the north side). In 1706, when Bath and Tunbridge had begun to supplant Epsom in the favours of the fashionable set, an entrepreneurial apothecary called John Livingstone saw that the inaccessibility of the old well on the Common had become a disadvantage. He opened his New Well in South Street, just north of the Symonds Well pub, and supplied it with a bowling green and other leisure activities. His coffee house, on the site of today's Albion pub, offered dancing and refreshment, while the adjacent shops provided additional inducements to spend.

As we turn back eastwards along the south side of the High Street, we see No 147, which dates from 1692. It was known as the New Tavern and also as the **Assembly Rooms (4)**, a name it has recently regained, though it is still remembered by many as Waterloo House. This is a unique survival - the main entertainment centre of the spa period. Here were rooms for eating and

drinking, and for gaming and dancing, along with space in the grounds for bowls and cock fighting. Gordon Home in his Guide to Epsom states that in the early 19th century it also staged plays. But even before this time Epsom's star as a leisure place was on the wane and by the early 19th century parts of the building were in retail and residential use. Very recently a new Assembly Rooms has emerged and the exterior has been largely preserved. At each end, you can still see the arches through which it is popularly believed that patrons were once driven in their carriages to the interior courtyard.



Assembly Rooms



No. 143

Nos 143-145 are early 18th century, and the side and rear of the latter can be seen from the entrance to the Ashley Centre, which gives an idea of how many of these buildings were constructed.

No 143 (5) has an interesting ironwork canopy outside and, together with No 145, a fine balustrade at roof level. No 141 was built to fill a gap at a slightly later date and **Bramshott House** (6) (Nos 137-139) was built in the late 17th century. Then comes Nos 133-135, now Marks &

Spencer which looks as though it is all one modern structure, but the roof with attic over the eastern half together with the first floor wall shows it is older. Nos 127-129, a tall 18th century building, has kept its original bay windows and door-case.

The old King's Head Hotel, now sadly no longer standing, nor its attractive successor only recently demolished, is where Samuel Pepys stayed on July 14th 1667 and he relates in his diary that Nell Gwynne and her patron Lord Buckhurst together with Sir Charles Sedley "did keep a merry house" just east of the hotel. The name of Sweet Nell of Old Drury has been preserved for a century or more at **Nos 119-121** (7) with its balustrade, formerly adjacent to the hotel. Though long known as **Nell Gwynne House**, this was not yet built when she graced the town. Outside it, on the edge of the pedestrianised area created in the early 1990s, is a 19th century cattle trough that once watered the horses. It looks just like the one at the eastern end of the High Street, used by the Gypsies in Derby Week. Next, a pinnacle marks the entrance to the Ashley Centre.



Nos 119-121

Though this was created in the early 1980s, some 19th century remains survived at Nos 93-95 and also at the early 18th century No 113. Looking across the High Street at this point, we see the **Post Office building** (8) (Nos 74-76) which dates from 1897; from here to the corner with Waterloo Road the buildings were erected between 1901 and 1906. Of these No 72 was until recently the Wellington pub, and No 66 which has been a bank for one hundred years.

Crossing Ashley Road towards **The Spread Eagle** (9) we find that the northern side of the High Street is the outcome of road widening in the 1930s. Before that the road was half its present



The Spread Eagle

width. On the south side there is a varied mixture of 19th and 20th century shops, all of them modernised or replaced piecemeal - apart from **The Spread Eagle (9)** on the corner with Ashley Road. Built in the late 17th century, with its outbuildings at Nos 85-87 added in the 18th and 19th century, this was a pub and hotel until the 1980s. Behind the pub you can also see the entrances to the former stable yard, well used at Derby time. At this point we pass out of the Conservation Area.

There is less history in the eastern part of the High Street, but an artistic note is supplied by the imaginative **equestrian statue by Judy Boyte (10)**. This can be seen, appropriately enough, in Derby Square outside the new public library which lies off the north side of the street. It represents the racehorses Diomed and Galileo, which were respectively the first and (when the statue was conceived) the latest Derby winners.

On then to Church Street, once called the finest street in Epsom; this was in the 20th century before demolitions and road widening took their toll. No 2, now a pub, is worth a passing glance. When extended in 1937, this was a good example of Art Deco. On the opposite side is The Quadrant, a neat row of shops which in 1938 replaced the rather ponderous Public Hall built fifty years earlier. Then comes what was the **Educational Institute (11)** of 1895, with its terracotta decoration while facing it is the Baptist Chapel of 1907 and then at No 10 comes the 18th century Hope Lodge. This has just been refurbished as flats, unlike Cromwell Lodge its late 17th century neighbour, which was lost to the bulldozer in about 1970.



Educational Institute

On the east side, the 1937 fire station earned a word of praise from architectural critic Nicholas Pevsner; then comes a couple of Victorian villas in use as Clubs, followed by the United Reformed Church altered in 1964 incorporating part of its 1905 predecessor. This spot has been used for non-conformist worship for over two centuries. Beyond this we enter the Church Street Conservation Area, beginning with one of Epsom's oldest houses, **The Hermitage (12)** (No 45), which is early 17th century. Next to the parish church, this is one of the oldest physical links with Epsom in the days before the spa. It was extensively refurbished in 1996/



The Hermitage

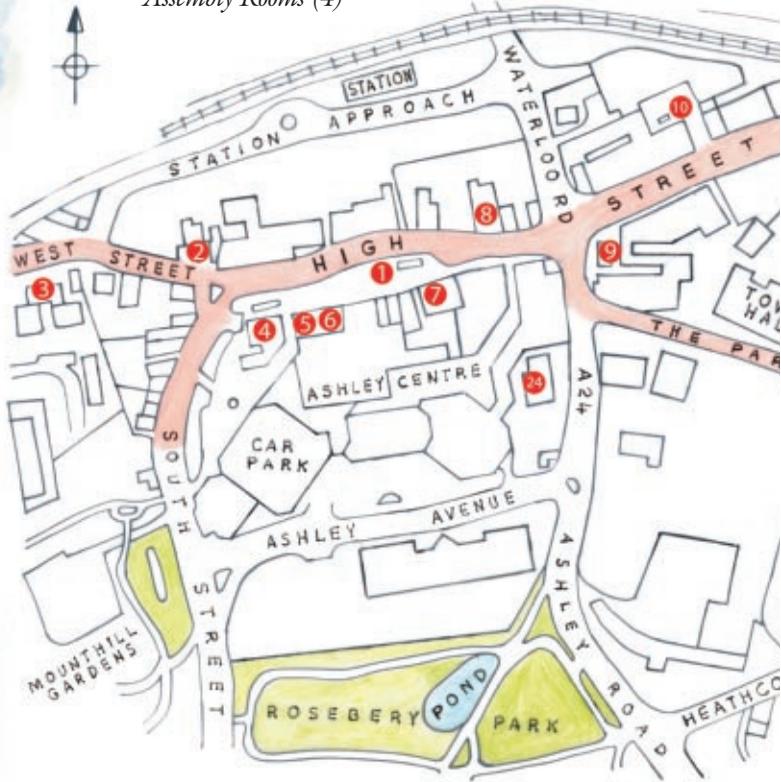
97 for a further life as offices and is of simple, even severe external appearance; internally the floor is lower than its surroundings, as so often with very old buildings. Immediately beyond are traces of the stables of the old Acacia House demolished in the 1930s.



Clock Tower (1)



Assembly Rooms (4)



No. 143 (5)



Nos. 119-121 (7)



The Spread Eagle (9)



Rosebery Cottage (23)



Educational Institute (11)



The Cedars (13)



The Hermitage (12)



*Church of St Martin
of Tours (21)*



Ye Olde Kings Head (19)



The Conservation Area reaches south to the foot of Burgh Heath Road, taking in Grove Road, Laburnum Road and parts of the nearby Church Road, Worple Road, Heathcote Road and The

Parade. The stretch of Church Street south from Grove Road sets the tone for the area. It is narrow, almost enclosed in appearance, with a varied array of large buildings of good quality.

The Cedars (13) (No 14) is of late 17th and early 18th century construction with later extensions and it has an imposing brick front and doorway. It takes its name from two magnificent cedars of Lebanon, sadly blown down by the great storm

in 1987. Today two young cedar trees, one grown from the seed of the old ones, stand outside. The builders used mathematical tiles for an extension, which may be seen on the Worple Road side. Next door at No 16 is Cedars Cottage, a more modest 18th century building with 19th century bay window. Built as coach house and stables for The Cedars, this was privately occupied until quite recently. No 18, of the late 17th century with a 19th century porch, was the Vicarage until post WW1. There is a 19th century extension beside it with an interesting tile-hung tower, containing pleasant two-storey accommodation and a single-storey coach house. Then comes No 20, **Richmond House (14)**, the central part of the late 17th century with a new early 19th century frontage. This is perhaps the finest house in this row, with its pilasters and pediment. It was converted and extended in 1995 and used as a private nursing home.



The Cedars

A detour can be made to **Grove House (15)**, though it is not actually in Church Street. It is a large mansion, built around 1770, which stands in its own grounds and which has now been divided into apartments. It can be reached by a short diversion along Grove Road and into The Grove, taking the first turning to the left.

Returning along Grove Road to Church Street, we pass Beechwood (No 57) by the corner behind its old walls. This was built around 1870, and is used as offices. Between No 57 and the Church lie Nos 59 and 59A, **Stone House (16)**. Formerly the two addresses formed a single residence. Stone House is an 18th century updating of a 17th century timber-framed house, while 59A is a 19th century extension. It has a modern doorway, put in when the two properties were separated. Right behind them, visible from the church forecourt but not from the road, is **Church House (17)**, occupied by the parish offices and two halls on two floors. This started life as a brewery and up to its closure in 1922, this brewery spread halfway across the church forecourt, shutting off the view of the west door from the road.

Across the road at No 24 is the early 18th century **Park Place House (18)** with later side wings, which was formerly Parkhurst. This stands end-on to the road, with its doorway entered on the south side up a semi-circular flight of steps. Nos 24A/B in its grounds formed the coach house, stables and accommodation for the outdoor staff. Tradition has it that Charles II provided stabling here for Nell Gwynne's horses, but as these buildings are early 18th century, they were not the ones used by the King's mistress. Today the two buildings are occupied by a single owner. Next again, and directly opposite the church forecourt, is **Ye Olde King's Head (19)**, a weather-boarded house built in the late 17th century and converted to a pub in the following century. Its inn sign has for many years, displayed Charles II, who is further commemorated next door by Charles Stuart House. This is an office block built in two stages in the 1980s, on the site of the former Farm Garage (Ford sales and servicing).



Ye Olde King's Head

Finally on this west side we reach No 50, **National Counties House (20)**, the headquarters of the building society of that name since 1994; it was previously known as Ebbisham House. The centre section, dating from 1722, was built for an Epsom merchant and the original wrought iron gate is still in use. The two wings, added more recently echo harmoniously its 18th century design. Across the road, behind the wall that runs along Pitt Road and Church Road, stands Pitt Place. This is a modern apartment block which perpetuates the name of a splendid property on the same site, developed in 1770 from an older farmhouse. This was the place where the debauched life of the 2nd Lord Lyttelton came to an end at the young age of thirty five in 1779. Despite being under a preservation order the building was bulldozed in 1967 and, of its complex of out-buildings, only the 18th century ice-house was spared. The 18th century wall separating it from the church forecourt also survives.

Today this forecourt is mostly used as a car park while at one time it was the site of the maypole with its annual observance.



Church of St Martin of Tours

And so we come to the **Church of St Martin of Tours, Epsom's parish church (21)**. No doubt a church has stood on this very site since Saxon times, and one is certainly mentioned in the Domesday Book. The early church would have been built of timber but in the 13th century it seems to have been rebuilt in stone. This

was replaced about 1440 by a new and larger church with a tower surmounted by a slender spire at the northwest corner, and this in turn gave way in 1824/25 to a still larger building, although the old tower was retained. Then around 1900 plans were drawn up for a massive new church in Gothic style, with a porch in a large square tower on the north side. In the event, only the eastern half was built, so that the chancel and transepts are of 1908/09, leaving the smaller 1824 nave along with the tower of c.1440. Oddly the two halves are at a very slight angle to each other, obvious in aerial views and easily visible from inside. This is the building that remains today, except that the spire was removed after storm damage in 1947. The tower is the oldest surviving structure in Epsom.

To return to the town centre, we can retrace our steps along Church Street. Alternatively, to take in a few more heritage sights, we can go along Worple Road and turn right into Heathcote Road, right again into Laburnum Road, then left into The Parade and so to Ashley Road and back to the Spread Eagle. No 2 Heathcote Road is an attractive 18th century cottage; other pleasing features here include the terrace of Nos 6-12 (mid 19th century), and the **Rising Sun (22)**, a weather-boarded pub of the 19th century. Turn into Laburnum Road to reach The Parade where the

gem is No 14, **Rosebery Cottage (23)**, a detached weather-boarded cottage of 1766. There are many weather-boarded cottages surviving around Epsom, but No 14 is unusual in its imposing front doorway, built by John Greenwood.

One or two of the alleyways leading off The Parade are worth exploring, although the road itself is now dominated by the 1934 Town Hall with its 1992 extension. It brings us out into Ashley Road where, almost opposite to the left, stands **Ashley House (24)** with its impressive door-case, built in 1769. The house takes its name from Mary Ashley who lived there for many years. From the 19th century until recently this building housed the Registrar and numerous weddings were celebrated there. A few steps further on and we are back in the High Street. Our tour has revealed only a little of Epsom's heritage and there is much more that can be seen.



Rosebery Cottage

These notes have described the High Street and Church Street but there are many other places of heritage interest in Epsom. One has to be the Well which originally brought fame to Epsom; this is in the Wells estate on the Common, a mile outside the town, and can be reached by way of South Street, Dorking Road and Wells Road (with signposts). Discovered early in the 17th century, and a focus of interest for nearly 100 years, the well then fell into neglect until it was refurbished in 1989 and fitted with a distinctive well-head.

On the way to the well South Street and Dorking Road still boast several 17th, 18th and 19th century buildings of interest. On the west side of South Street we see No 26, the main part early 18th century behind a 19th century shop; No 34, another restaurant (19th century); and Abele Cottages (Nos 58-62). Opposite are Nos 29, a delightful building and No 55 (late 17th century) at the corner of Ashley Avenue. No 73 (London House), built around 1600 is possibly the oldest house in Epsom, and No 75 is 18th century with an old shop next door. Passing the 18th century Woodcote Hall we cross into Dorking Road and continue just beyond the Hospital to the White Horse pub and the 17th/18th century group of Hylands Mews (Nos 67-69), The Hylands (No 71) and Hylands House (No 73). Constable stayed at Hylands House for a time and painted the building, which belonged to his uncle. The New Inn stood here, and the road was New Inn Lane. At this time the way to the well lay along White Horse Drive opposite. Just inside this drive there survives an interesting though unobtrusive old house, Tamarisk Cottage, probably a former dairy and the dwelling of the dairyman.

The area of Woodcote and Chalk Lane is another centre of heritage interest and has many homes built in the 17th and 18th centuries for wealthy owners. These include Woodcote Hall, Woodcote End House, Queen Anne House, Westgate House, Woodcote Green House, Maidstone House, Chalk Lane Hotel, Woodcote Grove and, perhaps best known, (The) Durdans, which was the home of Lord Rosebery - Prime Minister; three times Derby winner and local benefactor. Close by is a charming group of cottages in Chalk Lane, well-known and often visited.

If we continue out along West Street and pass under the railway bridge, we come to West Hill. This begins with Fair Green, where fairs were indeed held on the open space backed by an old listed wall, and continues to Clay Hill Green and then to Stamford Green. The row of assorted Victorian houses at Clay Hill makes an attractive sight: it was here that Eclipse, the unbeatable racehorse, was stabled in the 1770s. Close by is West Hill House, originally an 18th century property and rebuilt in about 1978. Stamford Green was formerly a separate community with a thriving industry in brick-making. The modern community has developed to the South of Stamford Pond and Christ Church (built in 1876). It has a picturesque 19th century pub called The Cricketers and a variety of modest but pleasant Victorian houses and other buildings.

A complete change of style and setting can be found in Prospect Place. There is the Bugby Chapel, a hidden gem in this modest road tucked away behind East Street and reached via Church Road and Hawthorne Place. The chapel is named after the man who built it in 1779, and for many years it attracted a congregation in the Strict Baptist or Calvinist tradition. For a time in the 20th century it was loaned out as a synagogue for Jewish refugees from Europe, and then after a period of disuse it was converted for commercial use. Today it has survived against all the odds, small and plain and not much changed in outward appearance since it was built two and a quarter centuries ago; it is now called the Meeting House. A further link with its origins can be found in the gravestones which stand on the small lawn by the building, where the Reverend William Bugby and his followers rest under the grass. The Bugby Chapel is a delightful little relic and deserves to be better known.

Indeed, Epsom still has much to show.

We hope you have enjoyed your walkabout.

Prior to 2011, Epsom Civic Society was known as Epsom Protection Society. The Society is grateful to Tom Dethridge, a former Chairman of the Society who wrote the text of this Heritage Trail. The illustrations are by Denise Pattison, a local artist.

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