Memoirs of

THE EPSOM DERBY

For generations, the world-famous Epsom Derby has been far more than just a horse race for local residents it - has been a tradition, a celebration, and a source of pride.

This special Derby newsletter features recollections from over the years, kindly shared by some of our clients and volunteers here at Age Concern Epsom & Ewell.

We hope you enjoy reading these memoirs and looking at the accompanying photographs.

Recollections from the 1930s

My memories of the Epsom Derby go right back to when I was four or five years old. Mum and Dad took my sister and me to the Derby one year, but it poured with rain from start to finish.
My sister and I sheltered under a policeman's rain cape. We never saw the race.



As I got older, Derby Day became part of growing up in Epsom. Schools always closed for the occasion and I'd spend the day with friends soaking up the atmosphere as crowds poured into the town.

We just went to the Organ Inn and called out to people on the open top buses "throw out your mouldy coppers", made a fortune, at least 6p.

That was part of the excitement of Derby Day, suddenly Epsom was full of people from everywhere, all there for the races.
It was always exciting so many people came to Epsom.

There were traditions too. Every year we'd wait to see the King and Queen, and later the Queen and Philip, as they arrived for the Derby.

Although so many famous horses raced at Epsom over the years, the one race I remember most was the one where I won.
I was about 15 or 16 and in love at the time.

I put one shilling on a horse called **'My Love'** and it won.



My Love - Derby Winner 1936

I only remember the one race when I won.

Even years later, when I was away on holiday and people asked where I came from,
I always felt proud to say Epsom.

It always sounded good to say I'm from Epsom where the Derby is held.

Doris L

The Epsom Derby

AGE CONCERN EPSOM & EWELL

Recollections from the 1940s

EPSOM PREPARES FOR THE DERBY

Not since 1939, when E. Smith rode Blue Peter to victory for the Earl of Rosebery, has the Derby taken place at Epsom, and although Pont l'Eveque, Owen Tudor, Watling Street, Straight Deal and Ocean Swell has each won his niche in fame, somehow the wartime substitute at Newmarket lacks the magic of Epsom, and racegoers are thankful to return to the old course, which has been the scene of so many triumphs and disappointments. Preparing Epsom for the Derby of 1946 is no light business, as the grandstand has suffered bomb damage, but it is good to know that the turf is in wonderful shape and that all will be in readiness for the great day



CLEARING BOMB DAMAGE IN THE EPSOM GRAND-STAND in preparation for the Derby of 1946, which will once again be run on the traditional course instead of at Newmarket



THE JUDGES' BOX AND UNSADDLING ENCLOSURE, and in the background a general view of the Epsom course: The turf itself is in excellent condition, but much remains to be done

The first Derby I remember after the second War was held on a Wednesday . As one of the first major sporting events after the war it was something very special, people and their coaches came from all over. From early morning the traffic stretched back as far as North Cheam. A one-way system was created on to the Downs. The race as I remember, some 80 years ago, was won by a horse named 'Airborne'.

Alan B



Removing barbed wire from the judges' box

I walked to the Derby

I have lived in Epsom all my life "Derby Day" played an important part in my young years. When the race returned to Epsom after the war I skipped school and went to the meeting which I think was won by Airbourne - a grey.
Living on the Wells Estate I walked each way.

Admission to the Downs was free and anyone could go on the hill in order to get a better view. The parents of one of my contemporary friends took two tents setting up camp the day before inside the Tattenham Corner bend in order to get a good position to watch the races.

The atmosphere was so exciting!

There was a fun fair on the green on the opposite side of the road - with gypsies and fortune tellers plying their wares and fun rides to go on. By the course I watched Prince Monolulu in a fantastic costume with feathered headdress going round selling names of winners to gullible punters.



Prince Monolulu (taken in the 1930s)

Buses were well organised between Epsom station and the course. Whilst not everybody had cars in those earlier days traffic was a big problem with many vehicles overheating going up Ashley Road causing further problems.

In later adult life I was lucky enough to be invited by a company putting on an open-top hospitality bus which was great. Excellent view upstairs with top class catering lunch on the lower floor.

David K



Traffic to the racecourse

The Epsom Derby

AGE CONCERN EPSOM & EWELL

Derby Hospitality

When I was involved with the Derby activities, it was a very long time ago. I worked as a server in the restaurant in the Grand Pavilion. Unfortunately, I was absent when the Queen came to the Derby. I thoroughly enjoyed my involvement there, and those are some of my happiest memories.

I never really had much interest in horse racing itself, but I always thought the horses were very large and magnificent.

My husband would occasionally place a bet on a horse.

I remember the atmosphere being celebratory and exciting, with everybody seeming happy.

A Client

Recollections from 1978

The year that Shirley Heights won the Derby our family (who always used to have a small bet for fun) forgot to have a bet – and my Mum's name is Shirley.

Gary B

The clean up - earlier methods

My sons went to the Beacon school and about 30/40 pupils would be paid to clear up the litter after the Derby. I made my sons 'litter pickers' by cutting a broom handle in half and inserted half a nail so they didn't have to bend down to pick up the litter. When they came back from their first session they said "Dad, could you make some more of those litter pickers as our friends would like one?"

Nigel K



HRH Elizabeth II & Queen Mum 1965

When I was young, the Derby was always held on a Wednesday.

My aunt lived on the route the late Queen took up to the Downs, and we would stand by the roadside waving as she passed, while open-top buses carried crowds from London. The funfair arrived on the Sunday before, and I especially loved the roundabout with its galloping horses. The Romany gypsies, with their beautifully painted caravans, fascinated me, and each year one would tell my fortune, always mentioning Argentina, which at the time meant nothing to me.

On my last visit to the Derby, I was pushing my baby daughter in her pram when another Romany woman looked at her and said, "There will be another — stage, Argentina," before disappearing into the crowd. Years later, my son, through his school choir, was chosen to appear in the original stage production of Evita at the Prince Edward Theatre alongside David Essex, Joss Ackland and Elaine Paige. That was the closest our family ever came to Argentina, and perhaps the answer to those mysterious predictions.

Aileen D

A lifetime of memories

Epsom Derby was always a special occasion for me. My first memory of the Derby was getting a half day off from Glyn School on the Wednesday of the Derby in the 1960s. One of my fondest memories was, as a teenager, going up to the Derby Fair in the evening of Derby Day.

I particularly remember Galileo winning the Derby in 2001, when I attended as Mayor of Epsom & Ewell as a guest of The Jockey Club, recalling the great fun of mixing with the great and the good in the Queen's Stand.





Derby Day traditions were also an important part of my childhood, including being taken to Hook Road to wave to Queen Elizabeth II as she returned from the racecourse.

Alan Carlson,
Mayor of Epsom, 2001

The Epsom Derby

AGE CONCERN EPSOM & EWELL

Did you know?

The Epsom grandstand was once the childhood home of the famous Mrs Beaton for a short period before she went to school in Germany.

Her stepfather, Henry Dorling, was the clerk of the Epsom Racecourse and was granted residency.



The new race stand, Epsom 1829



Derby Winners 1910s



Derby open-top buses 1920s

Have you seen the historic winners' brass plaques in the Epsom Market Place?

1780
Horse–Donned
Jockey–Sam Arnull
Winner of the first Derby

2001 *
Horse–Galiileo
Jockey–Michael Kinsane
Champion sire 11 times and has sired a record 5 Derby winners

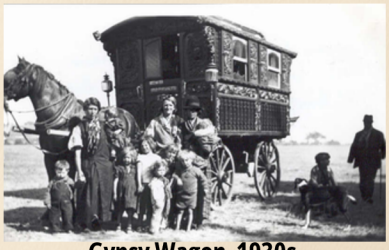


Derby Winner 1932 Winners Circle





Lester Piggott 1994
The most successful jockey in the history of the Derby with 9 wins.



Gypsy Wagon 1930s



Derby Crowds1930s

We send our thanks to Bourne Hall Museum for providing most of the images within this newsletter.

AGE CONCERN EPSOM & EWELL

The Old Town Hall
The Parade
Epsom
KT18 5AG

Age Concern Epsom & Ewell provides many services including Information and Advice, Medical Transport, Social Support and Befriending. None of our services would be possible without our dedicated and wonderful team of staff and volunteers, as well as the support of our local community.

To find out more about what we do please visit:

www.ageconcernepsom.org.uk or call **01372 732 456**