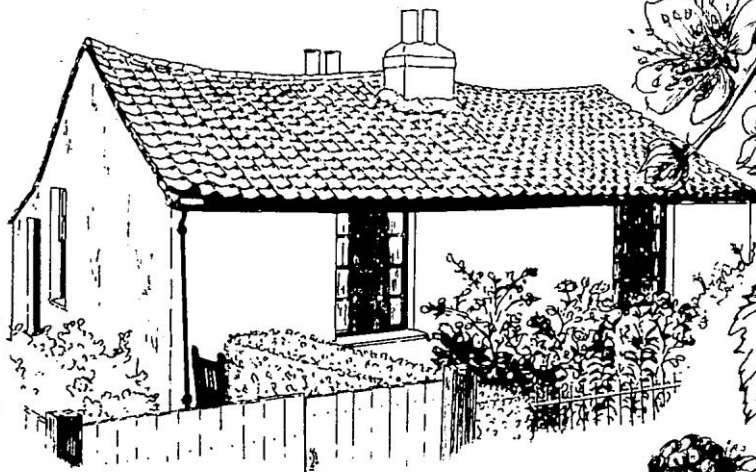


EPSOM COMMON



PUBLISHED BY
THE EPSOM COMMON
ASSOCIATION



FOREWORD

Epsom Common Association was founded in 1974 by Ted Dowman, then living in the Greenway, Epsom. In his original foreword he explained that the Association was formed after he had written a letter to a local paper complaining about the way motorists drove over the grassy areas around Stamford Green. He was also concerned about horse riders who thoughtlessly rode over footpaths, making them difficult for walkers. The subsequent development of the Association is described on p41 and included the restoration of the Great Pond, for which we received a Civic Award (p42). Bob Dye, who initiated this, is the only founder member of the Committee still active, though he is well into his eighties.

I became chairman in 1983 and Ted left Epsom in 1985. We have since followed a similar programme of walks, displays at local functions, talks to local groups and we have added an autumn lecture as well as one at the AGM. We have maintained our interest in conservation, especially in scrub clearance, and though the Borough Council's activities have been limited by lack of funds we are grateful to the Surrey Wildlife Trust, the Lower Mole Countryside Management Project and many volunteers for their help. We have been greatly concerned about possible effects of a proposed Epsom bypass and one route across the Common was seriously under consideration. This now seems unlikely but other routes and the development of Epsom on land belonging to hospitals to the north of B280 could have direct or indirect effects on the Common.

In 1991, the Corporation of London acquired the adjoining Ashted Common, part of the same SSSI, and great progress has been made there in practical conservation by traditional methods of management.

In preparing this reprint with such additions as were practicable, we acknowledge the work of the original editors and the contribution of Norman Nail. We are grateful to Brian Salter, the original publisher, for giving us the negatives and copyright, and to the late Norah Willett who gave us the copyright of her illustrations and also a generous donation to the cost of reprinting. We also thank Deborah Inman for expert assistance in making the necessary arrangements and many of our members, local firms and organisations listed on the back cover who have contributed to the costs.



Harold Gough (Chairman)
58 Hookfield, Epsom KT 19 8JG

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FRONT COVER - 33 WOODLANDS ROAD

This old bungalow, with its roof of large clay pantiles, is one of a number of similar ones on the Common - the others are far less visible and less original in appearance and are mainly in the Bracken Path area. Residents who have lived in Woodlands Road for many years tell us that no. 33 was built before the railway opened in 1859, for the Matron of the Workhouse. This stood on the site of the present Epsom General Hospital, and the Matron walked across the Common over the area of the railway line to get to work.

In Woodlands Road there were also several other houses, many of which have gone since the 1866 map survey, but, later, houses were built on the same sites. However, some of those from pre-1866 still remain - nos. 6 and 7 weather-boarded and no. 14, at one time a public house called the 'Welsh Ram'. At the lower end of the road there lived towards the end of the 19th century Mr. and Mrs. Marney, originally travellers, and still spoken of with affection. Marney's Close is named after them.

Epsom Common

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A view from near the highest point on the Common, looking south-west, with Ranmore Church on the horizon. This modern scene makes an interesting comparison with the 17th century illustration of the Wells area in chapter 2.

Introduction

All commons are, and have been for many centuries, private property. They were long ago in the possession of the Lord of the Manor within whose boundary they lay. Over the centuries, most of them have been passed by inheritance or sale to owners who have no connection with the manor, but who have been bound by law to respect the traditional rights of the Commoners. These rights are very ancient and interesting, and in past times they were enjoyed by numbers of people who held land as long-term tenants of the Lord of the Manor.

It should be stressed that commons must not be confused with common fields: 19th century maps of Epsom show considerable areas marked 'Common Fields', and these represent the residue of the strip-farming which was predominant in medieval times and which finally died out in the 19th century. These common fields were worked in a primitive rotation by the community, and produced crops which varied somewhat according to local soil structure, but which included some form of grain, followed the next year by peas or beans; the third year of the sequence left the common field strips fallow, and then animals were pastured on them, as they also were after harvest in the grain years. Incidentally, the term 'Manor' has undergone fundamental changes in meaning over the years: in origin, it meant the landed property owned by the Lord of the Manor, much of which was held by the tenants, who had to pay the Lord in services which could become very burdensome.

The common itself, often known as the 'Waste', was quite separate from the common fields. It afforded people who had strips in the common fields, and sometimes other villagers, these highly valued rights, which included free access to the common, and also the right of pasture, so that they could graze beasts there, with certain restrictions as to the number. Piscary was another right, and this meant fishing in any waters on the common, though at Epsom, as elsewhere, there were certain restrictions on this too. Turbary and estovers were rights which entitled you to gather turves or gorse for fuel, bracken for thatch and cattle-bedding, wood for the fire and for minor building. Timber, which meant full grown major trees, was usually excluded from Commoners' rights, and so, of course, was hunting.

The origins of the medieval agricultural system with its open fields and rights of common are complex, but these basic institutions, as well as those of the manor and the parish, took shape in the later Saxon period.



During the Middle Ages, stinting became an accepted practice in many areas. This meant placing a restriction on the number of cattle and sheep that people were allowed to turn onto the common for pasture, and it was clearly a much resented but also a necessary development. The commons could very easily become overstocked, to the detriment of man and beast alike.

As the common was in fact the total uncultivated part of the manor, its size varied over the centuries. At times of falling population, as in the century after the Black Death, cultivated land went back to waste, and the common increased: at other times, for example in the 12th and 13th centuries and the 16th, when population was increasing, there was pressure to bring common waste under cultivation.

This might be done by individual initiative, 'assarting' as it was called, but often it was the manorial lord who promoted it: thus conflicts with those having an existing right of common could arise. This source of tension must be clearly distinguished from enclosure, which applied to both common fields and common waste alike. It was undertaken in order to change the whole economic basis of a village, turning it over to pasture for sheep, or to individual farms. The former was the main reason for enclosure prior to the 16th century: and the latter the main reason for 17th century and later enclosures. Indeed by 1800 most English villages had been reorganised on an individual farming basis, and common fields and common waste had been swept away. However, in some areas, pieces of waste were left unenclosed right into the 19th century. Epsom was one of these; here enclosure came very late, not till 1869 in fact.

By the mid-19th century, these surviving common wastes were still being subjected to such traditional misuses as squatting, rubbish dumping, uncontrolled vegetation, fires and so on. There was, in consequence, great pressure from people with manorial rights to have them enclosed and built on, or improved for agriculture.

In the mid-19th century, however, it began to dawn on some people in high places that the commons represented a most valuable community asset and that, especially around London, these open spaces were most necessary for reasons of health and general amenity. In 1865 the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society was formed to resist enclosures and to protect the commons from infiltration by landowners, railway companies, road builders and other developers. Its first chairman was Lord Eversley, and a prominent member was John Stuart Mill; this society did successful work in preserving commons and rights-of-way. In recent years the increasing interest in conservation and in the protection of wildlife has been of some help in maintaining such commons as still exist.

It is fair to emphasize that from the 17th and 18th centuries, right down to the present day, commons have suffered

encroachment at the hands of the small landholders as well as from Lords of the Manor. Small gardens and cottage plots have never been difficult to enlarge by manipulation of fences and boundaries if they lie next to common land. And in recent centuries, since feudal disciplines began disappearing, squatters have contrived rough and ready homes for themselves on 'waste' land and



acquired rights of some sort by use and custom. The Royal Commission on Common Land, which made its Report in 1958, published an enormous, varied and interesting quantity of information about commons in general, hitherto largely unknown, much of which may be readily found in Stamp and Hoskyn's excellent 'The Common Lands of England and Wales'.

The waste of Epsom, on which there were rights of common, covered all the land surface of the parish, other than the common fields, and the crofts and kitchen gardens around individual cottages in the village near St. Martin's: similar crofts in the various dispersed hamlets of Woodcote Green, Stamford, Horton and so on, were also, of course, excluded from the common waste. The boundaries of the parish and manor of Epsom were identical in medieval times. It so happens that a most interesting written version of the metes and bounds of the parish survives as a late 15th century entry in the cartulary of Chertsey Abbey, whose Abbot was the Lord of the Manor of Epsom.

The metes are the points where the parish meets with several other parishes, and the boundaries (bounds) the lines between fixed points dividing the parish from its neighbours.

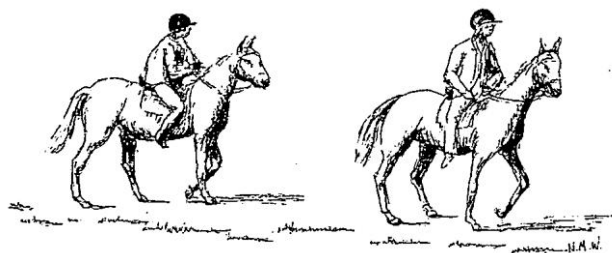
Parish boundaries often go back to at least the 9th or 10th century, and the 1496 entry in the Chertsey Cartulary is no doubt a repetition of much earlier material. The bounds of many parishes were perambulated annually; the procession usually began from the Church, or the Manor, where the manorial court was held, and moved round in a clockwise direction. The Cartulary entry reads as follows :-

*1233. Ebbesham. The metes and bounds of the manor there begin. .
at Wolfrenesherne and so to the well called Abbotisput and so to Sebireghes upon the hill
and so upon the hill from the said place to the King's way which goes from Kyngeston
towards Reygate and so by the land of the lord Abbot called Denelond unto the way called
Portwey and so to the hedge called Motschameles and so leading to the corner called
Merlesherne next As shested and so to a place in the heath called Werehull being next the
King's way which goes from Kyngestone unto Valton upon the hill and so unto a hedge
(hesiam) called Cheseldone Parkhatch and so unto a place called Kocschete and so unto the
corner called Brette-gravesherne otherwise Wolfrenesherne upon the said etc.*

The probable interpretation of this perambulation, as here recited, is that we begin at Wolfrenesherne, which is thought to be a corruption of Gefrenesherne (court house corner) and proceed in a clockwise direction round the parish. Luckily, at the end, we discover that court house corner is identical with Brettegravesherne, which means Beorgh's (a man's name) grove corner. Beorgh's grove (medieval Brettegrave) is the manor on the Epsom / Chessington border, which stood where the Castles now is. The Castles is the earthwork of a 12th century moated homestead, and the wood around it is still called Butcher's Grove. If we now follow round clockwise, we come to the well (here meaning quarry) called Abbotisput, which is, no doubt, the chalk pit, now filled in, which lies under part of Alexandra recreation ground. As opposed to other chalk pits (eg. that by the church), this one was the Abbey's property and so is the Abbot's pit. Chalk was in use as a building material and was also crushed for marling the clay land in the north of the parish.

The boundary now runs south onto the Downs to a place where there are seven barrows (sebireghes). There has been considerable destruction of the early Saxon barrows on the Downs above Ewell, Epsom and Banstead, but several still survive, and we must envisage a barrow field on the Downs near Buckles Gap. In fact, a 17th century estate map shows 11 barrows here. The medieval boundary walkers counted only seven, but stone or turf and stone piles could be mistaken for barrows by the 17th century surveyors, and as the area is now built over, the exact number cannot now be known. There are, however, seven close together in line on the 17th century maps.

From this barrow field, the boundary, having picked up the old Reigate-Kingston road in Epsom Lane North, turns west across the Abbot's Denelond (=Downland) which is, of course, Epsom and Walton Downs, lying north of Nohome Farm, originally so named because it was in the hands of a baliff and not the actual Lord's home (in this case obviously not, as the Lord was the Abbot of Chertsey). Where the boundary reaches the



Portway (ie a road on which goods could be carried by pack animal) which is, no doubt, the Ashtead

Walton road, it turns north and runs up to the earth embankment, which runs north/south across the fields parallel with the road, and is called Nutshambles on 18th century maps. The cartulary name, Motshambles, means the meeting benches, and here, probably, was the open-air meeting site of Copthorne Hundred court which covered Epsom, Ewell, Cuddington, Packevsham, Ashted, Burgh, Leatherhead, Tadworth, Fetcham, Thorncroft, Walton on the Hill, Headley and Mickleham.

The boundary then went to the chalk pit, now called Pleasure Pit, which became a popular site for jolly gatherings of one kind and another until fairly recently; and then to some high point on Epsom Common near where it begins to fall away at Woodlands Road towards the forest called the Lookout Hill (=Werehull).

The road from Kingston to Walton would have been on the line of Horton Lane, Wells Road, Wilmerhatch Lane and Headley Road, so the position of the Werehull cannot be far from the present parish boundary across the track that runs from the forest and is continued in Woodlands Road to Wheeler's Lane End. At this point, the text has inverted the next two points, a not uncommon occurrence, since the copyist had not, of necessity, seen the bounds on the ground and walked them. So we have to take the Kocschete next. A Kocschete (=a cock shoot) is a glade in the woods where nets were spread and woodcocks driven into them and shot with crossbows (for food rather than sport - see heading of next chapter). The site of this cockshoot is preserved in the modern name of Woodcock Corner. After this the boundary goes past the gate into Chessington Park (Chesildone Park Hatch) which can still be identified as a track crossing the parish boundary from 1 Park Place along the edge of Pond Wood, and the boundary then returns in a direct north-eastern line to Brettegrave, and we have completed the whole circuit of Epsom parish, including its open fields and down-land pasture and the Common, which was the manorial waste.



The fact that Kocschete and Park Hatch can be so readily identified still is the main reason for assuming an order inversion at this point.

Some interesting points arise from the perambulations. Brettegrave, in spite of its location at the extreme north east of the parish, seems to be the original manor of Epsom, and Horton its successor. There is no real tradition of a manor near St. Martin's Church - the more usual site, although one might suppose the Grove could have been the original manor site. The manorial court was later held at Epsom Court Farm, but there is no need to suppose this was the original manor, and one can only speculate on the events which led to the site of Brettegrave manor being moved to Horton and the court to Epsom Court Farm. The Manor House in West Street, now a hotel, was never a manor proper, but was so called because in the 17th century the lady of the manor's bailiff lived there.

Horton Manor was also a moated site and this can still be seen near Horton House, a 17/18th century house now incorporated in Horton Hospital. Horton, which means the farm on the muddy (because clayey) land, was the site to which Brettegrave Manor moved in the 13th century and, it seems, the stewponds and Brettegrave mill were attached to it once the original Castles site was abandoned.

The boundaries of the parish, as delineated in the Cartulary, are very similar to the present ones with minor changes - the site of Brettegrave (the Castles) lies just outside now, for example, but

there is a re-entrant angle in the northeast which shows where the original meet with the adjacent parishes was. Other changes exist but, of course, especially on downland and common land, medieval boundaries were often just imaginary lines without fencing or banks and ditches between fixed points, usually where direction of the boundary changed. Kocschete (Woodcock Corner) is a good example of such a point. On the north, west and south, the boundaries of the medieval parish are now also those of the borough; only the Epsom/Ewell boundary on the east is now an internal one of no administrative significance.

It is clear from the above account of the metes and bounds of Epsom that the area with which we are concerned and which is now called Epsom Common is a rather smaller expanse than the original waste, which included a very large expanse of downland south of the common fields of the village.



The question of common rights in this district has had a long and complex history. The final outcome brought about the establishment of the Conservators of Epsom and Walton Downs, and the buying out of the manorial lords' rights by the Borough Council in 1955. But from the 17th century, when racing became an important feature of the Downs, Epsom Common has had a history of its own, quite distinct from that of the Downs.

Epsom Common (in the narrow sense) lies about half a mile to the south west of the centre of Epsom itself, which is 14 or 15 miles from London. Its site is a huge bed of London clay, up to 200 feet thick and almost impermeable to water. There are deep valleys which were carved by long extinct rivers that traversed the area millions of years ago, and these valleys let quantities of water run off much of the Common; but for them, it would be almost totally waterlogged, and, even as things are, it has always been wet enough. The rivers came down from the high chalk ground, and the early course of the Hogsmill can still be traced to the top of Pebblecombe Hill.

The geological map indicates that, more than a million years ago, two rivers joined at the site of what is now the Great Pond, where there was a large lake. Evidence of this is the alluvium covering some 20 acres, deposited during those very distant prehistoric times.

The Hogsmill River now rises in the springs in Ewell village, but on its way to the Thames at Kingston, it still collects water from streams that originate on Epsom Common. These streams have been largely covered up by conduits or other artificial channelling as field drains. Prior to the mid-19th century, as earlier maps show, several streams joined the Hogsmill on its way through Ewell from the Common. These streams are usually nameless. The river name Hogsmill is late, and refers to the owner of one of the gunpowder mills set up on it. In medieval times it was called the Luterbourne, which means muddy stream, no doubt because of the semi - solid material in the water draining down from the Common.

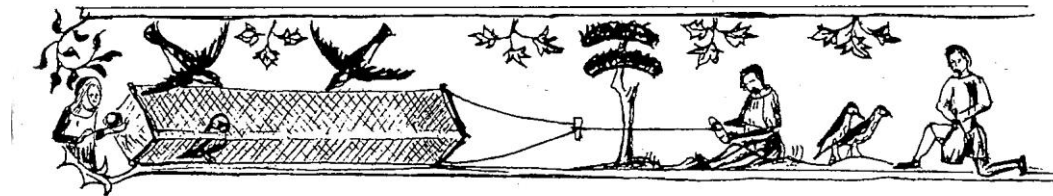
The earlier and larger system of headwaters of the Hogsmill has in several places on the Common deposited gravel and alluvium, and a long patch exists where the two streams joined at the site of the Great Pond. Another and coarser patch of gravel lies on the east side of the Common and extends down over much of the western side of central Epsom, covering the Reading and Thanet Beds: these remain exposed in a narrow band from East Street over the lower end of Church Street to Woodcote Green and the Dorking Road.

It is of interest to note that Ewell, Epsom, Ashted and Leatherhead are sited on the spring line, that is the line where the chalk dips under the blanket of London clay, so that the Reading and Thanet Beds lying between the chalk and the clay are exposed. The Thanet Beds consist of fine grained sand, the Reading ones of pale coloured and mottled clay with occasional pebble material, which does not chill the marrow to the same extent as London clay. All these villages were therefore fortunate in having easy access to water supplies, without the disadvantage of deep, unyielding clay, which is the basis of our Common, whose story is well worth knowing, independently of that of the town.



The six illustrations within this introduction show the main modern-day interpretation of 'rights of common'. Access for recreation is virtually the only use, be it by those who reside nearby, or by persons from further afield with possibly some specific activity in mind. Young horse-riders and a group on a nature trail, all on their separate laid out routes, supplement the more informal use by bird-watchers, 'canine constitutionals', and picnic parties. Additionally, such open spaces, particularly near built up areas, can provide a very useful and economic means of laying new public utilities, at a fraction of the cost that would apply in a developed area. A SEGAS main was laid some years ago on the south-western side, and while it doubt less caused some consternation at the time, its presence now will be little noticed by those unaware of its existence. In well-executed works, after a few years, the marker posts need be the only reminder.

1 Before the Spa Period



NETTING BIRDS – from Bodley Ms.264, 14th century.

The known history and archaeology of Epsom, including that of the Common, may be considered in terms of what happened before the Spa developed, during its heyday and after its decline. For the rise and fall of the Spa in the period 1620-1750, there is a good deal of written evidence, although not as much as we would like. For the post Spa period up to the present, any amount of material exists, and the question arises as to how much can be digested into understandable narrative. For the pre-spa period, records are very limited. What we have available so far is mostly medieval. There were Mesolithic camping sites along the spring line, and no doubt Epsom had one of them. Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation of the chalklands and valleys of north east Surrey is widely attested, although Epsom's nearest real monument of these times is the impressive bowl barrow in Deerleap Wood, near Wotton in Surrey.

The earlier peoples of the area must have known Epsom Common, although its character would have made it unattractive to them except for fishing and fowling. No substantial archaeological material, earlier than medieval, is known from Epsom or its Common, except for a Bronze Age burial found in the grounds of Epsom College, in which the body was covered with a layer of mollusc shells, presumably of ritual significance.

The area that is now Epsom and Epsom Common was probably familiar to the earlier peoples of north-east Surrey, but as part of some other entity. There were Iron Age settlements at Leatherhead and Ewell. And there was a Roman villa, to which was attached a manufactory making roof tiles and box tiles (the flues for central heating installations in larger houses). This villa was sited on Ashted Common and it was connected to Stane Street, the Roman arterial road which ran from London to Chichester. This connection was a side road over Ashted Common (see map overleaf) . It was probably the readily available clay which led to this Roman industrial establishment on Ashted Common.

Epsom village came into being in the 6th century as a Saxon settlement on Stane Street, centred on St. Martin's Church. Epsom, including by implication Epsom Common, appears in early lists of the properties of Chertsey Abbey, which was founded in 666, the earliest religious house in Surrey, and one which suffered greatly at the hands of the Danes. In the 9th century, King Alfred granted Chertsey a charter, to confirm the Abbey's traditional lands and holdings, and Epsom is mentioned, along with many other Surrey villages: from time to time, later in the Middle Ages, there were more records of Chertsey property, and they all included Epsom.

Medieval scribes were not fussed about spelling. Epsom appears from the 11th to the 15th century variously as Ebesham, Epsam, Ebsham, Epsam, Hebsam, and later as Ebbesham, Ebbisham, Ebyshame, Ebbysam, Epsham, Evesham, and Epsom. The name is from the Saxon Ebbi's ham, Ebbi's village. Ebbi was doubtless the leader of the original band of settlers.

That Chertsey Abbots were the ultimate lords of Epsom does not mean that there were no manors in the village: indeed there were at least two, one now lost under the church, and one at Brettgrave in the far northern corner of the parish. In later medieval times, the manor court was held at Epsom. The abbey would have put tenants or bailiffs in the manors to run them, and the abbey's cellarer would call in on Epsom at intervals in his circuit of the abbey's domains to check on how things were going.

The Domesday Survey of 1086 records Epsom as one of Chertsey Abbey's holdings, the entry reading :-

Ipfa abbatia ten EVESUA IN COPEDORNE HVND. T.R.E. fe defd g . XXXIIII . hid . Modo < p . xi . hid. Tra . e . xvn . car . In dnio. e una . 7 XXXIIII . uitti 7 mi. bord cii. XVII . car. lbi. 11. aeccke 7 vi. fcrui . 7 11. mo lini de . x . lblict. 7 xxim . ac pti. Siluar^dc . xx . pore. T.R.E. uatb. xx . lib . Modo^xvn . lib.

and translated runs as follows :-

In COTHORNE Hundred

The Abbey holds EPSOM itself. Before 1066 it answered for 34 hides, now for 11 hides. Land for 17 ploughs. In lordship 1;

34 villagers and 4 smallholders with 17 ploughs. 2 churches; 6 slaves

2 mills at 10s; meadow, 24 acres; woodland at 20 pigs. Value before 1066 £20; now £17.

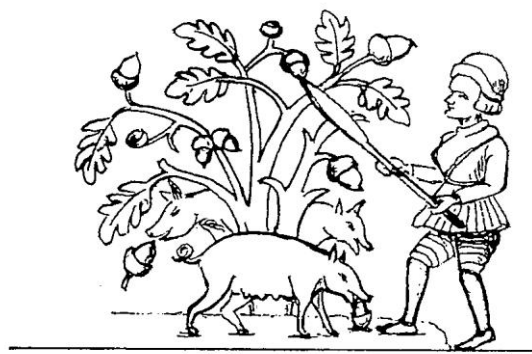
Interpretation of the curt officialese of Domesday is fraught with pitfalls, but in general this entry tells us that Epsom pays dues and other services to the Abbot of Chertsey. (He in turn would owe dues or services to the King). Its direct taxes to the crown were assessed at 34 hides before the Conquest, and are now only 11. But the hide, a unit of 120 acres, is here an assessment and does not necessarily imply a one to one relationship to land in cultivation or other use, nor does a reduction in assessment mean less tax. It is rather like the balance between rating valuation and rate in the £1.

The entry tells us that there is cultivated land that needs 17 plough teams to work it (a team was 8 oxen) and that the villagers have indeed got 17 plough teams (which means 136 oxen). The majority of the population have strips in the common fields -34 households out of 44. Allowing 5 people to a household and an addition for people not counted in the survey (for example, priests and other ecclesiastics, also independent full-time craftsmen), the population would be about 250.

The two churches present no problem: one is St. Martin's , and the other a chapel of ease set up on the edge of the Common near the present Cricketers' pond, probably at the turn of what is now East Dean Avenue. The chapel is attested in several medieval documents, and perhaps catered for the inhabitants at Stamford, and Horton or Brettgrave.

One of two mills was almost certainly at what is now the Cricketers' pond, and the other at Brettgrave. They are assessed for tax at 10/- each.

The 24 acres of meadow shows Epsom had plenty of water. The meadows, which lay west of the village where the western High Street now is, were sizeable. In this area water was obtainable just below the surface, and winter streams ran freely. The entry for woodland certainly refers to the



KNOCKING DOWN ACORNS FOR SWINE -
from the Barnard wood carvings
at Abington Hall, 1485 - 1508.

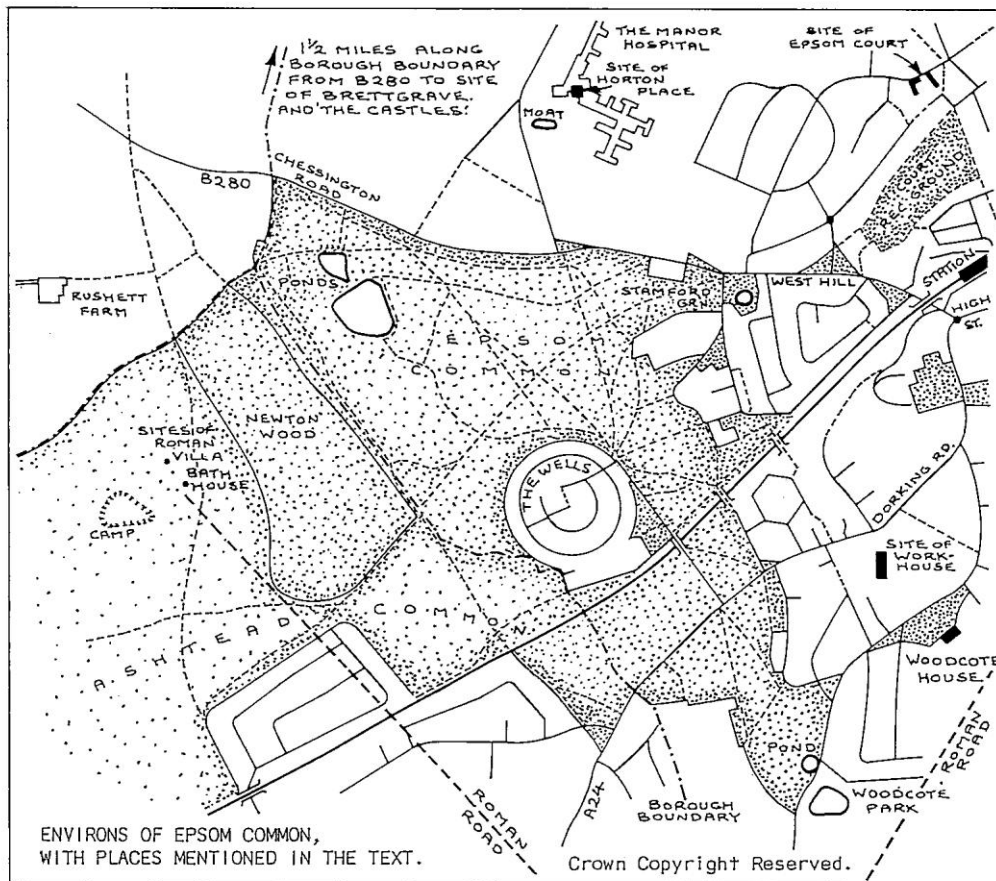
Common and its use as swine pasture. The 20 pigs is again a tax assessment which was often a seventh or a tenth of the real number, so we can reckon on some 140-200 pigs rooting on the Common. The Anglo-Saxons were great pig-keepers, and pigs remained a necessary food resource in most inhabited parts of Surrey in the Middle Ages (as did apples, which were used more it seems for cider than for sauce). There is no doubt that the Common must have seen a good deal of those bristly, greenish, razor-backed animals, quite unlike the pigs we know now and far smaller, but equally interested in rooting for acorns.

The value item tells us that in money terms the total value paid in tax was £20 before 1066, and is now £17.

The Victoria County History sets out well documented facts about Henry I, who ruled in the early 12th century. He granted the Abbot of Chertsey leave "*to keep dogs on all his lands, inside the forest and outside, to catch foxes, hares, pheasants and cats, and to enclose his park there and have all the deer he could catch, also to have all the wood he needed from the King's forests*". These were mighty privileges indeed, which later on were somewhat modified.

Henry II (1154 - 1189) claimed the whole county of Surrey as part of the Royal Forest, in which Forest Law obtained. One has to remember that the word 'forest' 'as applied in medieval times carried legal overtones rather than those of natural history or vegetation. A forest could be an area with relatively few trees, often it was open scrub or moorland, with perhaps stretches of woodland here and there. What mattered to local residents was the Forest Law, which preserved all hunting for the King and prescribed ruthless penalties for poachers. The Forest Law could not prevent commoners from exercising their common rights, but it must have added considerable tension to the lives of the peasants, since fishing and hunting proved irresistible, despite those barbarous punishments.

The Abbot of Chertsey ruled an extensive domain and administered great wealth as a result. One might have thought that our Common, the Lord's waste (a term referring to the Lord of the Manor not to the Almighty) constituted rather a humble corner of empire for the Abbot, but it secured him the highly-prized provision of fish. The Stew Pond has been a well-known landmark for many centuries and, until the early years of the 20th, it yielded first-rate carp, valued in the Middle Ages for use on days when meat-eating was prohibited, and also as a welcome additional source of fresh food, given the small size of medieval livestock.



People often wonder about the derivation of the term 'Stew Pond'. The Germanic root is Old Norse, but came to this country as the Norman French word 'Estui' and this means an enclosure: hence pig sty - an enclosure for pigs, steward or stigward - a man in charge of an enclosed estate, stew - a bath house or small room. A stew pond, where fish were enclosed (alive!) and a stew pot was a vessel where food left overs were stored and cooked up (dead!).

The lower Stew Pond which is barely an acre in extent had from medieval times to mid-19th century, as a neighbour, the much larger and probably older Great Pond. Both of these were fish ponds which may have been associated with the Brettgrave part of the Manor of Chertsey, a portion of this area later became known as Horton. Although no actual documentary evidence exists it is obvious that the ponds were built at the order of the Lord of the Manor, the Abbot of Chertsey Monastery. It is true to say that the expertise needed to build such projects was also possessed by secular people and did not solely lie in monastic hands. However, the balance of probability lies strongly in the assumption that the Great Pond was constructed by the monks. It is known that they made the much larger, 30 acre, Gracious Pond at Chobham and the method of construction used at the Epsom ponds bears a close resemblance to known monastic work in this field. There is some evidence, not yet fully analysed, that a herbal garden was cultivated just north of the Great Pond, such as monks frequently developed for medicinal purposes. Whoever planned the Great Pond first chose an admirable site, a huge half-saucer shaped bed, which could be dammed along the straight edge. They made strategic use of the contours and the natural drainage of the Common and created a lake of over 12 acres. The straight edge of this lake they sealed with a dam almost 170 yards in length, built to first-rate standards. The dam had a core of that impermeable London Clay, which would have been liable to crack in drought ridden summers, so the builders overlaid it with a skin about 3 feet thick of slightly permeable alluvium. Sometime in the Mid-19th century, this dam was breached and the pond drained. How do we know about its original structure, when

documentary evidence has so far apparently been non-existent? Because in the 1970s, the Great Pond was reconstituted. An account of this is given in Chapter 4 (page 42). Bob Forster, who undertook this work, discovered the facts about the pond's original form when he carried out site tests over the whole area, prior to designing the 6-acre lake we can now enjoy.



HUNTSMAN - from Bodley Ms 546.

One further point about the medieval Great Pond - it was never technically or legally regarded as part of the Common, though it was situated in the middle of it. Thus the Lords of the Manor, who were till the mid 16th century the Abbots of Chertsey, had entitlement to its excellent carp, and the Commoners were excluded from fishing rights there.

There is a record of the late 13th century which is of significance for anybody studying Epsom Common's history. Hugh de la Lane of Ebesham gave "*to God*

and the Church of the blessed Peter of Chertsey" 2h acres of land on Ebesham "*lying at la Rushette*", the Abbot "*rendering there for yearly to me and my heirs one rose at the feast of the nativity of John the Baptist*". This same Hugh also gave to Roger, perpetual vicar of Ebesham, one acre of land and one rood; annual payment for this on "*the day of the nativity of the Lord*" was to be one root of gilly flower (the old name for wallflower). This kind of peppercorn rent was not uncommon when medieval people wanted to endow an abbey or a parish church. La Rushette, now known as Rushett, is still a farm on the verge of the Common on its Chessington side. The meaning of this name is 'the stream with rushes'. The suffix -et or -ett is not uncommon in Surrey, combined with names of trees and so on, as in the names of Willett, 'the stream from the well', and Birkett 'the stream with birch trees on its banks'.

Place names and personal names become more understandable as one works through the 13th and 14th centuries. The name Horton means 'muddy' or 'dirty' farmstead. Stamford, a fairly frequent village name, means 'the stone based ford', or 'the stony ford' and probably, in our case, the name was adopted because the stream (in earlier times a wider waterway than nowadays) flowed out of Stamford Pond and across the track over whose route our B280 was later constructed. The track would require a ford in which waggons would not get stuck, especially if a mill lay nearby with its wheel fed from the pond.

Such roads as passed through the manor and the common fields were provided with gates, known as hatches, at the boundary fences, to prevent stock from wandering, as the 20th century cattle-grids do. There are place-names which have their origin in these hatches, such as Wilmerhatch Lane and Hatchgate. The enclosed subdivisions of the common fields were locally known around Epsom as 'shots'. Oakshott is the name given to a man holding a shot with an oak tree in it or near it. Many surnames can be traced back to the 14th century, and some reflect who you were or what you did - for example the Coopers, Warreners, Fletchers, Saddlers, Forresters, Shepherds, Smiths and many more. Incidentally Smith was the name of the man whose business it was to smite, as in hammering iron.

Other surnames referred to where you lived. Living in Epsom, and also on or near the Common, there have been for many years Longhursts, dwellers by the long wooded hill; Ratcliffes, people who belong to the red cliff; Rysebriggers or Risbridgers, dwellers by the rushwood bridge; Briscoes, dwellers by the birch wood. All these derivations are very old and based in Anglo-



MEDIEVAL SMITH.

Saxon.

An outstanding character of the 14th century was John de Rutherwyk, the Abbot of Chertsey, through whose vitality and business acumen the administration of the Abbey properties was systematically improved. For example, early in the reign of Edward III, de Rutherwyk enclosed and planted a wood at Chobham, and conducted a stream of water from Gracious Pond to form a moat round the manor house. Somewhat earlier, although involved in a mass of other business for Chertsey, he had ordered in 1307 that land was to be enclosed and a wood planted at Brounetts Grove, sometimes known as Butchers Grove, even more frequently as Brettgrave.

Brettgrave lay within the bounds of Epsom on the northern side opposite Horton, which was also part of it. There was a moated house at both places; the one at Brettgrave was abandoned in the 14th century, and the one at Horton which survived until the 16th century was its successor. The remains of the moat of both these houses can still be seen. No doubt the planting of the wood was to use the abandoned manor site.

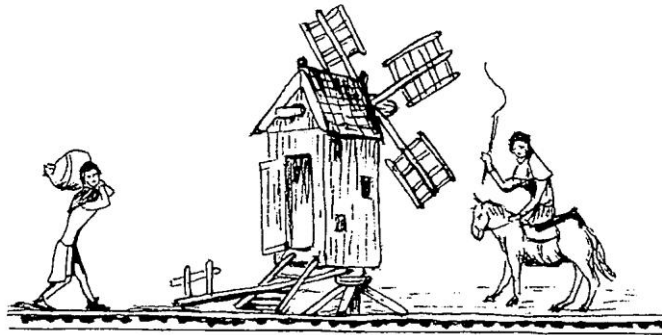
This Abbot had to make quite a stand to secure Chertsey's properties. He was involved in fierce litigation with a man called Henry de Saye, who tried to prove that the Abbey had no right to Brettgrave, and who actually made off with quantities of its grain, together with farm equipment and other valuables, before the Abbot's recourse to law caught up with him. Later, in 1323, Rutherwyk had other litigation, against a royal bailiff, who drove 1500 sheep from Epsom, all the way to Banstead, where, for lack of nourishment, some of them died, and the Abbot was awarded only £1 in compensation. But Abbot John was equal to this sort of thing and he consolidated the Chertsey properties and added to them, partly by using his influence to exact generosity from landowners. In 1338, for example, two Epsom people, Peter atte Mulle and Richard de Horton, made grants of land adjacent to our Common for the Abbey. Peter atte Mulle could have been a dweller near the Stamford water-mill, but he could also have been a dweller near an earlier version of the 18th century windmill which stood on the higher part of the Common near the later saline springs.

The 14th century was one of almost continuous turmoil and tragedy in Europe and also in England. There were wars, especially the Hundred Years' War, but also civil wars, and there was plague, and a great deal of moral corruption, and the beginnings of upheaval in people's religious conviction. Some historians consider this century to have been one of such profound distress and disquiet that ordinary men and women became deeply depressed because of combined physical hardship and emotional disturbance.

It is a profound mistake to under-estimate the extent of communication in the Middle Ages, and the Commoners must have been aware of the awful events through which Europe as a whole and England in particular were passing. Some of them, moreover, must have served against the French in the terrible campaigns of the Hundred Years' War, such as the one that culminated in the Battle of Crecy in 1346, and, no doubt, they underwent training in the use of the much feared long bow. A disaster that the Commoners could not possibly have escaped was the appalling Black Death, the bubonic plague, which reached England from Europe in 1348 and 1349. It is thought that at least one third of the population died within a few months. The infection respected no class distinctions, the wealthy and the poor all suffering. It has been said that if modern means of communication had then existed, and the statistics of all these sudden deaths had become generally known, the people who escaped the plague would have died of fright. It attacked England at least three times in the course of a few years.

No records have been published which cast any light on whether the Commoners of the 14th century ever heard of Geoffrey Chaucer or of John Wycliffe. Nor do we know whether Epsom was

involved with John Ball or Watt Tyler in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. But there can be no question as to the significance of the social commotions brought about in these years. The struggling



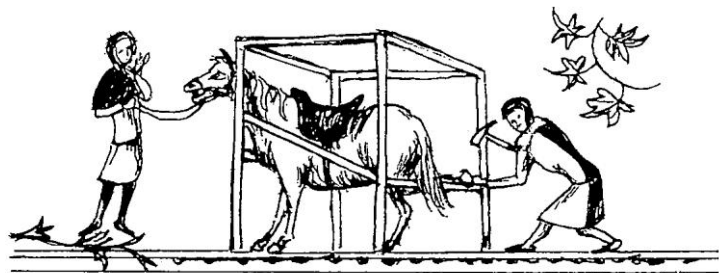
A WINDMILL - from Bodley Ms 264, 14th century.

community living around the Common in the early 15th century, along with the rest of Epsom, faced tensions and pressures as medieval feudalism and the power of the Roman Catholic Church began to weaken, and always there was the detested tax collector.

One of the most hated medieval taxes was known as the fifteenth, and it meant a fifteenth of the value

of your movables. It was said to have been thought up by Henry II in the 12th century as a subsidy towards Crusading expenses, and it was used from time to time by most of his successors. Edward III in the late 14th century ordered a new valuation, to keep up with price rises. It happened on various occasions that corrupt tax collectors overcharged people, and lined their pockets accordingly. In the early 15th century a writ was directed to the Surrey collectors upbraiding them for levying too much in a whole chain of villages, of which Epsom was one. Like so many of the isolated factual statements one finds in medieval documents about individual people and places, this story of tax-collectors overdoing their role leaves one wholly unsatisfied, because there is so much more we want to know. It is, at least, however, a reminder that, in the Middle Ages, people were subjected to a most complex and exasperating system of restrictions. These peasants who had been overcharged had to face demands for money from the Church as well as the King and they were also, of course, bound to give statutory seasonal services to their overlords in the fields, at ploughing, sowing and harvesting, for example: there were heavy herriots or death tolls, which had to be paid in kind, and which usually meant handing over your finest beast: peasants were obliged to take their grain to the Lord's mill and pay for it to be made into flour; in some areas they were even compelled to do their baking in the Lord's oven, and at Epsom, as elsewhere, the Forest Laws prevented them from snaring rabbits or fishing in the bigger ponds on the Common. A good deal of nonsense has been talked in the past, not so much in recent years, about medieval Merrie England. There was nothing merry about the social system and life style of these peasants, and one has to remember that many of them were rounded up for service abroad in the King's wars, and that injury or death from armed conflict or bubonic plague brought no supplementary benefit to anybody. So one hopes that the peasants who had been overcharged really did enjoy some relief, and that the collectors, who were clearly out to enrich themselves, were effectively prevented from pursuing this illicit form of gain.

It was about the same time, early in the 15th century, that one of the rare medieval references to our Common was set down in detail on paper. In a charter listing its possessions, the Abbey recorded its ownership of 100 acres of furze and heath on Ebesham Common, opposite the town of Horton, together with 3 acres of wood called Burnet Grove, and the entire hamlet of Horton - and that wood was the one planted over a century earlier in 1307, to which reference has already been made. There are some areas on Epsom Common today which must look very similar to that spread of 100 acres of furze and heath some 5½



SHOEING A HORSE - from Bodley Ms 264, 14th century.

centuries age.

References to our Common, however, are as hard to come by in 15th century records, as in earlier centuries until the last ten years or so, when a whole group of individuals is listed in the Chertsey Abbey Charters, and it is as if, all of a sudden, the people around the Common have sprung to life, and one knows their names and addresses. All those so named in the Abbey records of 1496 lived on the edge of the Common, with one most interesting exception. In 1489 *"Thomas Hoke of Horton in Hebsam"* stipulated in his will that 12d. was to go to the church in Epsom - this would be St. Martin's, where he was to be buried. Another 12d. was to go to the church at Chesyndon (Chessington). His sisters Ede and Joan were not forgotten - they were to have *"2 measures of barley each"*. And *"for the repair of a pond (unum lacum), in the highway betwixt Chesyndon and Kyngeston"* there was also 12d. So the repair of a pond ranked in Thomas Hoke's estimation equally with bequests to the church.

There were some Woodcote people named, the heirs of William Merston, for example, who owned a cottage with 2 acres of land and one rood at Woodcote. John Jonsone and his wife Agnes had two cottages *"lying in Woodcott Lane"*. John Nones, John Ewell and Agnes Hidman all had small patches of land in Woodcote, and their annual dues to the Abbey for these little properties varied from 4d. to 7s. In the same list, there are references to people living at Le Clay, which was Clayhill, renamed centuries later West Hill. John Richebell, whose surname crops up again and again, had a holding at Le Clay called Fowyllys, with 8 acres of land and one rood, and there are details of properties held by Thomas Perres the elder, Richard Oxcombe and *"John Kyng atte Clay"*. William Stone had a meadow *"lying in the croft called Le Hook"* and Richard Birde a small property called *"Millewardys landys"* and a croft called *"Somersgate"*. The original name of Wheelers Lane was Summersgate, and so these people's small parcels of land lay right round the Common from Horton to Woodcote. Alice Hyde's holding is much the most interesting in this series. She had one cottage *"newly built upon the waste land of the Lord at Stamforde Chappell"*, valued at 4d. a year. One would like to know a lot more about her. *"Stamforde Chappell"* is believed to be one of the two Epsom churches mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, so it seems that it had quite a long life. The reference suggests that her holding was one of the many small encroachments on the Lord's waste, of which more is said later on.

One other record of this period should be mentioned here. Merton College, Oxford, owned a good deal of land in Surrey, including properties at Chessington and also at Leatherhead, where the



A COUNTRY CART - from the Luttrell Psalter, 14th century.

College had a fine manor house, richly furnished, called Thorncroft. In 1497 Merton College rebuilt Thorncroft, using vast quantities of timber. Sixteen loads of this essential building material were taken from Chessington to Leatherhead, as well as from many other Merton holdings. The College was obliged to pay the Chessington carters extra fees because their loads got stuck in the deep and appalling mire. The route taken by these drivers ran just round the edge of Epsom Common, and their plight makes one realise how very much worse it would have been had their road taken them across the Common itself.

Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries has become a commonplace event in the history books. For hundreds of years the authority and prestige of the Church and of the monastic foundations had been one of the basic facts of life, even though from the days of the Lollard movement it had been criticized by some brave souls. When it dawned upon the public that the King was really bent upon closing these great houses and annexing their properties, many no doubt felt that the foundations of life as they knew it were being shattered to pieces. The social and economic changes of the later Middle Ages, however, had weakened the monastic system in many ways and it was not only the King who wished to see sweeping changes. He took advantage of widespread uneasy subversive feeling, as one can see by reading some of the anti-monastic pamphlets and some of the speeches made in Henry's parliament.

Chertsey Abbey was closed and its monks dispersed in 1537. The King took possession of all the vast properties, and it soon transpired that Tudor merchants and noblemen with plenty of wealth were fully prepared to purchase the lands hitherto owned by Chertsey and other Abbeys. The first secular Lord of the Manor of Epsom was Sir Nicholas Carew, but he did not enjoy his newly acquired status and land for long, as he was executed in 1539. The manor of Epsom then passed into the hands of a series of owners, some of whom were quite well-known people. Epsom was to become famous in its own right early in the 17th century, for reasons which are set out in the next chapter.



WOMAN MILKING A COW - from Bodley Ms 764.

The illustrations of the various medieval people and activities give some idea of the appearance of the times, and all could be most relevant to our Common. In particular, knocking down acorns for swine would be an activity often seen hereabouts, and the netting of birds has already been mentioned as a Woodcock corner speciality. The latter practice was not, in fact, entirely stopped in this country until the passing of The Protection of Birds Act in 1954.

2 The 17th – 18th Centuries

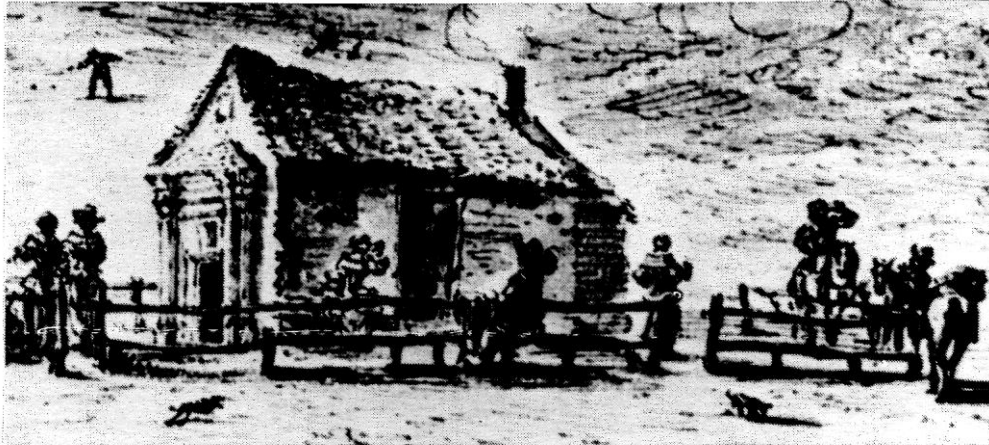
Trying to write about the 17th century events as they affected Epsom Common brings home the fact that great historical trends do not necessarily constitute the most important developments for people living in villages as difficult of access as Epsom was in those days. Consideration of the assessments for Hearth Taxes in the 1660s gives one as clear a perspective perhaps as can be found. The Hearth Tax assessments were made on the basis of the number of houses in the towns and villages under scrutiny. In the 1660s, Guildford and Kingston-on-Thames had about 500 houses each: Farnham 300; Croydon, Godalming and Reigate 160-180; Epsom, Dorking and Leatherhead 100-120. Even with the very large families which were usual in those days, Epsom could hardly have supported 1000 people in the 1660s, and there would have been considerably fewer in the early decades.

We know at least the names of the members of some such families. A "yeoman" of "Ebsham", called Averie or Avery Richbell witnessed two wills in 1603 and 1604. One concerned the sons of William Mathew who are listed as Avery, Jerrie, Benjamin, Zabulon, William, Mark, Nicholas, Francis and James. The other concerned Elizabeth Mathews, who *"dwelled along with Elizabeth Cole, widow of Robert Cole, late of Ebsham, being in danger of death by sickness and by a mischance that she had by a fall into the fire"*. There is, so far as one can tell, no evidence as to the reactions of these people, or, for that matter, of their neighbour Raff Parrish who was a labourer in "Ebbesham", to the political and religious ideas of James VI and I; or those of their families, later in the century, to problems concerning Parliamentary privilege or Oliver Cromwell's aspirations for democracy. There is need for a lot more research about our Common and Epsom's inhabitants in the context of the great controversies which raged in this period.

One local, and apparently temporary, crisis, however, sparked off a long sequence of developments which made our Common famous at last, and brought to it hosts of tourists. For over a hundred years, Epsom Common was to be in the news.

The year 1618 brought a summer of such drought that everything dried up, and people were desperate to get enough water to maintain their families and animals in health. A cowherd called Henry Wicker, or Wicks, was much pleased to find what seemed to be a fair supply of water coming from a spring on the Common, and he was greatly taken aback when his cattle refused to drink it, plagued as they were by thirst. Henry Wicker could not have known that magnesium sulphate would be detected in some Epsom water supplies over 75 years later, by Dr. Nehemiah Grew, the historian of the Royal Society.

Wicker's experience stimulated much curiosity about the spring he had found, and its properties were soon the subject of gossip. According to Henry Pownall, who wrote in 1825, physicians



analysed its water and reported that it was "*of a calcareous nitre and soluble bitter cathartic salt*". People used it at first for external sores, but they soon experimented with drinking it, and discovered that it acted rapidly and efficiently as an aperient, which was important in a society knowing so little about the cause and cure of constipation.

As early as 1621, the area round the spring was enclosed and became known as The Wells, there being in the end more than one well, and a "*shed*" was put up to shelter the people who came to try their luck. Later on, the Lord of the Manor, with an eye to the main chance, created a clear area round the Wells to accommodate the crowds, a rather unusual example of what encroachment initiated by powerful influence could achieve. In this area, rights of common did not apply. It was 40 rods in radius, about 450 yards in diameter, roughly circular in shape, and plainly to be seen on early maps. It is now built over and still forms an almost perfect circle, in which the main street is known as the Greenway.

Folk-lore about the waters developed very rapidly. One of the least probable of the myths was that they had cured Dame Durdan of paralysis and Gaffer Tomkins of his red nose. People in the 17th century loved talking about their ailments as much as they do today, and, from contemporary literature about the Epsom Wells, one may judge that hypochondria was a quite common disability. People began coming to Epsom in large numbers, and the place soon became a centre for tourists hoping to find relief from various ailments, or to satisfy their curiosity. Dutch visitors were recorded by 1629, and other foreigners followed. Visitors wanted amusement in between medicinal sessions and they found it not too far away on the Downs, where there was riding and horse racing, but nearer still in the town, where taverns, and later coffee houses, began to thrive, with dicing and card tables and other relaxations laid on.

Epsom was by no means England's first spa (or spaw as the 17th century spelling has it) in the sense of a place where people went to bathe or drink waters to benefit their health, but it was the first spa to develop a social and entertainment side, and this soon became big business. Epsom lay within four hours' drive of London, even on 17th century roads, and its main clientele were in fact Londoners. Not the very rich nobles but the rising prosperous commercial and banking class, city merchants, politicians and lesser nobles. In its social and entertainment aspect Epsom was the first in a very long and complex line of development. The early 18th century saw Epsom's lesson applied at other more opulent spas - Tunbridge Wells, Bath, Cheltenham and Buxton. During the 19th century the inland spa holiday gave way to the seaside holiday with sea bathing, at first a medicinal thing, but the social and entertainment side soon took over, as it had in the inland spas a century or so before.

By the 1640s, the Epsom waters were already famous, and the spa was then in full development. The awful Civil War was brewing, of course, but its devastating developments did not at first impede the Spa's growth. Lord North, no less, claimed, probably inaccurately, that in 1645 he was the first to publicise to Londoners how agreeable the waters both at Epsom and Tunbridge could be. This was the year of the Battle of Naseby. During the Civil War years, little seems to have been written about the waters and their cures, understandably enough, but they were much in vogue during the Commonwealth period.

Dorothy Osborne's letters to William Temple give all sorts of interesting side-lights on 17th century society. In 1653, she was full of information about the Epsum or Epsom waters. She wrote at length about "*a scurvy spleen that I have always been subject to*", and about the splendid effect the waters had had on this condition, which she diagnosed as being also the cause of William Temple's indisposition, and she strongly advised him to try the same remedy. She warned him, however, that so many people were going to the Wells that the waters were sometimes much diminished, and what you got was "*thick and troubled*" and "*not very pleasant to drink*".

Samuel Pepys, the diarist, had some experiences to relate about visiting Epsom. On July 25th, 1663, he spent most of the day in Clapham with friends -

"Towards evening, we bade them Adieu and took horse, being resolved that we would go to Epsum; so we set out; and being gone a little way, I sent home Will to look to the house, and Creed and I rid forward - the road being full of citizens going and coming toward Epsum-where, when we came, we could hear of no lodging, the town so full. But, which was better, I went towards Ashsted, my old place of pleasure, and there (by direction of one goodman Arthur whom we met on the way) we went to Farmer Page's and there we got a lodging in a little hole we could not stand upright in upon a low truckle bed". Of supper here, he wrote "among other meate, had a brave dish of cream, the best I have ever eat in my life - and with which we pleased ourselves much".

Next day he rode over to Ewell, which he spelt Yowell, on the way losing his dog. He was upset about this. His entry for July 27th reads:

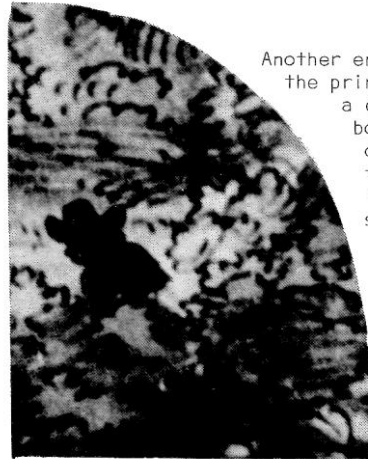
"Up in the morning about 7 aclock, and after a little study, resolved of riding to the Wells to look for our dog, which we did, but could hear nothing. But, it being a much warmer day than yesterday, there was a great store of gallant company..... There was at a distance, under one of the trees on the Common, a company got together that sung; I, at a distance, and so all the rest, being a quarter of a mile off, took them for the waytes; so I rid up to them and find them only voices-some citizens, met by chance, that sang 4 or 5 parts excellently. I have not been more pleased with a snapp of Musique, considering the circumstances of the time and place, in all my life anything so pleasant."

"Citizens" in Pepys' vocabulary indicated persons of somewhat humble origin, certainly not those of what he called "*better quality*". Considering the judgement of some historians that Cromwell's rule during the 1650s had strongly discouraged people from wasting their time with music, this entry has more than merely local interest.

Two years later, things were very different. The Surrey Quarter Sessions, in July 1665, sent instructions to Richard Evelyn, J.P., brother of John Evelyn, and Lord of the Manor of Epsom who lived at Woodcote, "*to shutt and locke up ye wells;..... and not to permit ye said waters to be drank off*". Evelyn was also instructed to do his best to prevent strangers and travellers from coming to

Epsom, and also to stop goods being brought in carts and waggons. This was because of the Plague. By August 1665, Pepys estimated that 5,000 people were dying in London each week, by September 7th, 10,000. The Quarter Sessions' instruction emphasised that "*there hath beene a great resort and confluence of people from ye said city to ye parish of Epsham..... under color and..... pretence of drinking the waters*". So the authorities were afraid of infection being brought into their patch.

By 1668, however, the Wells were in full fashion again, and doctors were advising patients to go to Epsom for cures, and Pepys made another visit. The procedures at the Wells delighted him. Loyal readers of his Diary will not be at all surprised that he noted how the men and women who drank the waters sought privacy thereafter in different parts of the adjacent area, and "*turned their tails up*". In 1667, he took some friends with him, and they all enjoyed the fine air and filled some bottles of water to take home with them. Characteristically, Pepys had a conversation with the two women selling the water who "*farm the Well, at £12.00 per annum, of the Lord of the Manor*". This entry suggests that facilities for visitors were not as yet of a very high order.



Another enlargement from the print on page 19 - a detail from the bottom left-hand corner. Surely this is a rare illustration of somebody having taken to the bushes, and, to quote Pepys, "*turned their tails up*".

There is much evidence that people did secure their supplies of the water by buying bottles of it. As late as 1688, when conditions at the Wells were improved, somebody whose name and address we do not know, kept endearingly haphazard household accounts, which can be read in the Muniment Room at the Museum in Guildford. This document records that, five times in about four months, "*epsome watters*" were fetched, usually by "*goodman souch*", at a charge of 1/- to 2/6 a time, though once it ran up to £1.0.0. Goodman souch's wife, "*goode souch*", did the laundry, also five times in the same period, and was paid 1/- or 2/-, on one occasion 11/-; and they bought a laundry line for 1/6. "*Ye chimney man*" cost them 12/-, 3 yards of "*black ribon to sow in ye half morning gown*" 9d.; other entries include a "*journey to London £2.5.0.*", "*lost at cards £2.0.0.*", "*for bleeding 5/-*", and on February 27, 1689, 1/- was spent "*for a bonfire for ye king's procklemation*". This King was William III. Plenty of other people secured their doses of Epsom water in bottles, and there is such a bottle, discovered on the Woodcote Golf Course, to be seen in the Guildford Museum. Defoe, in the 1720s, wrote about Epsom "*the retir'd part of the world, of which also there are very many here, have the waters brought home to their apartments in the morning*".

This digression from the chronological story of the Spa must now be abandoned, and we must go back again to 1670, when poor Richard Evelyn, to the deep distress of his brother John, died miserably of "*a stone in the bladder*". John attributed this calamity to "*drinking too excessively of Epsom waters, when in full health*". Then as now-, people in grief sought reasons behind the tragedies they had to face, and seemed to find some comfort in doing so, whether accurately or otherwise.

In spite of much assertion, hard evidence for Charles II's association with Epsom is very indirect and it seems unlikely he spent much time there. Nell Gwynne stayed in Epsom, however, with Lord Buckhurst and Lord Sedley, probably at what is now Bramshott House, when Pepys was in Epsom and he remarks "*they do keepe a merry house*". This was the year before Nell became the King's mistress, and she had a reputation as a good actress. Pepys much admired her histrionic attributes. There is a play at Shadwell called 'Epsom Wells' - a typical bawdy Restoration comedy which Charles II liked very much. Thorndike Theatre revived it some ten years or so ago. Charles II's taste was

however more for Tunbridge Wells in spas and Newmarket in racing. There is a strong tradition that Charles II had stables built for Nell in Church Street, which became known later as The Farm. In 1684, the London Gazette announced that "*the post will go everyday to and fro betwixt London and Epsom during the season for drinking the waters*", and this was the earliest daily delivery of mail to be inaugurated outside London, a most convincing piece of evidence that influential people were flocking to the Spa. They went only in the summer months, however. More will be said about roads and their winter conditions on page 22. To amuse the visitors, wrestling and cudgelling, hare-coursing and even pig-catching, became features of the season, as well as the traditional cards, riding and racing.

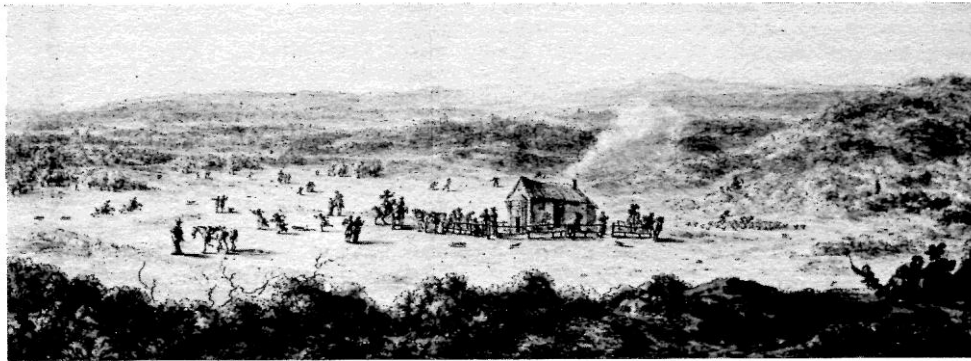
By 1700 Epsom was a very well organised spa, with several substantial public buildings, of which the most interesting was the Assembly Rooms built in 1690 - the first assembly rooms for a spa anywhere in England, indeed in the world. It consisted of two long rooms for gaming, dancing and other recreations such as plays and concerts, a tavern called the New Tavern and a coffee shop. The New Tavern still stands, later known as Waterloo House, and now the headquarters of the National Counties Building Society (see illustration on the back cover).

John Parkhurst became Lord of the Manor, following the death of Richard Evelyn's widow, who long outlived her husband. In the first decade of the 18th century, Parkhurst materially improved the surroundings of the Old Wells, by building a "*long room*" beside them, a coffee house, two rooms for gaming and shops for sweetmeats and fruit, so that visitors had more amenities on the spot and were less dependent than hitherto on what the town itself was offering. This was no doubt an attempt to revive interest in the waters as opposed to the entertainments the Spa offered, since we learn from several early 18th century visitors that most people did not come for the Wells, but for the Spa social life.

Soon after this, an apothecary called Dr. Livingston, or Levingston, came into the story. He has, until comparatively recently, suffered from a bad and hostile press. Traditionally, he was supposed to have been a rogue, because the story ran that he had opened a rival well in the town whose waters were "*spurious*", that he had set up bowling greens and other attractions nearby, lured the public to think his establishment much better than the one on the Common, and then nefariously bought the Old Wells and sealed them up. More recent research by F. L. Clark, amended in some respects by Dr. Lehman, suggests, however, that he was not quite as bad as former writers made out. Clark claims that Livingston kept the Old Wells going for at least six years after setting up his rival establishment and, indeed, introduced some expensive improvements there such as a new pump, and some repairs to Parkhurst's long room, and he certainly did not make a spurious well. There is good evidence that a saline well had been sunk near where his new establishment was set up, some twenty years or more before he arrived on the scene, while several visitors testify in their accounts that the waters of both his and the Common well tasted the same. His establishment continued into the 1730s and the Old Wells were reopened in the 1720s. When Defoe wrote of the Spa in 1724 he says "*as the nobility and gentry go to Tunbridge, and the merchants and citizens go to Epsom, so the common people go chiefly to Dulwich and Streatham*".

Livingston's rival New Well in the town, near the present 'Albion' building, attracted visitors for quite a long time. The number of barber-surgeons and apothecaries increased and new local inns were opened to accommodate the visitors. A man named Henry Norten, by profession a cook, was the first owner of the 'Spread Eagle', and he did very well there from 1710 onwards: and the 'Horse and Groom', on the site of the present 'Marquis of Granby' was first noted in 1719. But the decline set in the 1730s and by 1750 the Assembly Rooms were let out to tenants. Dr. Livingston's establishment was closed and so were the buildings at The Wells. The bowling green which was still in use in 1748 is referred to in 1750 as "*lately a bowling green*".

Epsom had fallen between two stools. It was not for the rich, who now went to Bath, Tunbridge or Cheltenham, while the poor went to the new spas at Hampstead, Acton, Islington and Richmond. Already in the late 17th century, Epsom was becoming fashionable in a different way, as a place of residence for city bankers and merchants with money to invest in country houses. This trend continued until the later 18th century, and Epsom has an enviable heritage of 17th and 18th century fine houses. So, in the town, prosperity found a new lease of life.



Part of a panoramic view of Epsom in 1662 by William Schellinks, (1627-1678), in which the general landscape and the clearing round the early wells is greatly similar to some parts of the Common today. Courtesy - Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

The fate of the Old Well, where it had all begun, was more ignominious, and it was finally closed in the 1740s or so, when even bottling of water and preparation of salts from it ceased. The buildings were demolished in the 1780s, and in 1812 Old Wells Farm was built. Its inner yard and the near fields were contained within the circular perimeter of the former well's enclosure. Nearby a fine windmill was erected, probably at about the same time - the exact location of well, windmill, farm and later developments are shown on a map in the next chapter. It is rather surprising that the Post Office Directory for 1845 states that medicinal springs were still in use, even though it admits "*not nearly so much as formerly*". Perhaps, as the well itself was in the garden or orchard of the farmhouse, the farmer did a suitable trade by way of a sideline?

There are considerable numbers of accounts of Epsom Spa when it was at its best. The diarist Pepys we have already quoted, Von Uffenbach, a German visitor of the early 18th century, William Bird in the early 18th while visiting England from the colony of Virginia, Defoe in his travel book 'Journey through the whole Island of Great Britain', all wrote about the Spa, and many other authors did so as well. The two most entertaining accounts are given by Toland, who lived in Epsom. In 1711 he wrote a description of Epsom and its social life for an imaginary girl friend, Eudoxa, and he issued a revised version in 1718. Celia Fiennes (pronounced Fynes) who visited Epsom twice, once in 1701 and again in 1714, had a great deal to say.

Toland gives an idealized account of Epsom Spa. He describes its healthy air, and excellent mineral waters, stating that it was "*deliciously situated in a warm bottom*" and that, nearby, "*the downs are covered with grass, finer than Persian carpets and perfumed with wild thyme and juniper*". He tells us that "*the view from the fertile common, on which the old wells are situate is, as from every elevation hereabouts, wonderfully delightful, especially the prospect of London, which is very distinct for so great a distance*". Toland had one stricture to make, however. "*Every Venus has a mole, and gossiping is the greatest objection I have ever heard made to Epsom*". His account is long, and at times somewhat overdrawn, as when he claims that the Common was fertile, but it is splendid reading.

Celia Flennes must now be considered. She was a most unconventional character, the grand - daughter of the 8th Baron and 1st Viscount Saye and Sele. Her three uncles, and also her five uncles by marriage, had all fought against Charles I in the Civil War, and her father Nathaniel was a Nonconformist. She certainly was endowed with the family characteristics of boldness, defiance of accepted custom and the habit of undertaking hazardous enterprises. She travelled on horseback all over the country, often alone but for a servant, met people of every class in society, stayed in remote and primitive hostleries, explored with insatiable curiosity all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and adored great houses. She was a non-stop writer. Her journal, which is vividly expressed and gives great detail, offers us information about the life and times of her era. She had a tremendous interest in "Spaws" and in her own health, which, judging by the adventures she undertook, must have been magnificent.

No great expert in the art of spelling, she covered pages and pages with reminiscence. She classified "Spaws" as "diaretic", "Spiriteous", "quick purgers", "scorbutic humours" or plain "stinking". Of Epsom, on her first visit in 1701, she wrote:

"The Well is large, without bason or pavement on the bottom, it is covered all over with timber and is so darke that you can scarce looke down into it, for which cause I do dislike it; it is not a quick spring and very often is dranke drye, and to make up the defficiency, the people do often carry water from common wells to fill this in a morning, which makes the water weak and of little operation unless you have it first (i.e. early) from the well".

She wrote that there was a walk between trees by the well, paved with brick, where "people have carrawayes, sweetmeats and tea etc". The fact that she mentions tea, means that despite the limitations of its surroundings, the Wells must have been fashionable, as tea was a relatively new and very expensive beverage. Celia said that "the Commones all about Eppsham is very good aire and the country like a landskip, woods, plains, inclosures and ponds".

On her second visit in 1714, she wrote "and now the Wells are built about and a large light roome to walk in brick'd, and a pump put on the Well, a coffee house and two rooms for gaming and shops for sweetmeates and fruite". For bowling one had to go back, however, into the town. Her journal supports the evidence that Parkhurst had much improved the Wells' surroundings. Very impressive is her remark that "Eppsham shall be cluttered with Company from Satturday to Tuesday, and then they (the visitors) many times goe, being so near London, so come again on more Satturdays", a clear picture of a favourite weekend spot.

The story of the Spa tends to override other aspects of Epsom Common's history in the 17th century, naturally enough, because the attractions it offered led to such changes. Other events should not be passed by, however. In 1663, for instance, a licence was granted to "George Parsons, to digg and make bricks and tyles in the Common or waste of this Manor near a place called Summersgate for the term of 5 years". This was the Brickfield near Wheeler's Lane (earlier known as Summersgate) and almost beside 'The Jolly Coopers'. Dr. H. R. Lehmann has worked out the ownership of the adjacent cottage, garden and stabling from 1663 to 1897, using the Surveys of Epsom (1680 and 1755) and the Court Rolls. The business thrived for over 200 years, and there are interesting 19th century references to it which are discussed in the next chapter. During the Middle Ages and up to the 19th century the cottages in Epsom, as in all other Surrey villages, would have been timber-framed, and the spaces infilled with wattle panels coated in clay daub. Other types of skin came gradually into use in the 17th century and later, such as clap boarding (weather-board) and brick tile. Supplies of stone for building, except chalk, were non-existent in the neighbourhood and, when required, excessively expensive to transport. Brick came into favour rather slowly and, at first, was used almost exclusively for the large chimneys which Tudor architects made much of. In the 17th

century, brick began to be used more freely and with real artistry, as we can see in many Spa-period buildings in Epsom, and consequently the Brickfield became a feature of the Common and must have provided much-needed employment for local people.

Another dominant factor in the routine of Epsom life came into prominence in the reign of Charles II, when Richard Evelyn's widow, Elizabeth, the Lady of the Manor, was granted permission to hold a market in the town on Fridays, and also two annual fairs. This grant, renewed in 1685, allowed her *"customary rights in respect of tolls, pitches and stalls"*.

There were two detailed Surveys of the Manor in this period, which should now be described, one in 1679-1680, when Richard Evelyn's widow was Lady of the Manor, the other in 1755. The earlier one is, of course, hand-copied in the meticulous script of the times, with the contemporary abbreviations and idioms, and it is packed with detail, setting out the extent of the Manor, with the names of the tenants and the acreage of their holdings. Specific questions had been put to the Steward with regard to the rights of the Lady of the Manor and the rents and services owed to her by the tenants, many of whom would be in effect freeholders, having their land subject to the rights and customs of the Manor. Proof of their ownership was a copy of the relevant entry in the Manor rolls, and they were therefore known as copyholders. To many of these questions, the clerks entered the definitive answer *"Wee know not"*.

In 1755, the later Survey was compiled by officials who freely copied, as was the custom, from the earlier one, and who seemed somewhat defeated by the difficulties of their assignment, as they made even more frequent use of the phrase *"we know not"*. They stated that Ebbisham Lower Common contained *"about 300 acres, more or less"*, Woodcote green about 5 acres, Upper Woodcote Green about one, Clayhill and Stamford Hill about 6 acres, more or less. *"But how or whether the same commons are stinted, we know not"*. Stinting meant limiting the number of animals Commoners could put out to pasture. There is reference to *"several trees growing before the said commons;...but whether the said trees are timber we know not"*. *"Timber"* was legally the possession of the Lord of the Manor and tenants were not allowed to make use of it.

There was a good deal else they didn't know. Dorothy Barnes, a widow, claimed to hold a cottage, yard and orchards, amounting to about a quarter of an acre, *"built upon land taken out of the waste ground of this Manor near Stamford Hill by Thomas Barnes about 35 years since, but by what rent or services we know not"*. About 19 other small properties are mentioned, all around or near Stamford Green, and in each case the description ends with the same words-, *"by what rent or services we know not"*. All this is in keeping with similar entries made in 1680, and it suggests that little houses and gardens had been set up on the Common over a period ranging from 2 to 100 or more years, by a steady process of minor enclosures or encroachments. The Survey tells, as the 1680 one had, that *"officers were to receive or gather rents and profits of the Manor as Bailiffs, beadles or woodwards"*, and added *"but what fees or wages are belonging to such officers we know not"*.

As in 1680, the tenants who were copyholders had rights of common at the rate of 2 sheep only, and no tenant was allowed to pasture sheep other than his own, except for 3 days a year, when the sheep were washed. *"Not withstanding the above order, it is agreed that any tenant that is poor and of small ability may keep greater numbers of sheep so that they exceed not the number of ten, and the same be his own proper goods and no foreigners"*. Copyholders had to give the Lord of the Manor their 2 *"best beasts"* when they inherited property on the death of the previous tenant, and they had to keep their buildings in good repair and *"ought not to pull the same down without licence of the Lord of the Manor"*. Although the tenants were allowed to let their cattle drink the waters of the waste, fishing and wildfowling were for the Lord of the Manor only, and he had as well the right to free warren, which meant that even rabbit catching was forbidden to tenants. Two Drivers or

Common Keepers were to be appointed each year to look after the Common, a duty which included the prevention of poaching and the tiresome task of fire-fighting.



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These Surveys show that the community on the Common was increasing in numbers, but they suggest that, despite the development of great and beautiful private houses around the area, and despite the influx of moneyed visitors every summer during the time when the Spa was in vogue, the ordinary people of Epsom were in general poor, and that their holdings were small, and their livelihood won almost on a day-to-day basis, the weather being all-important. Socially, these people were still much under the authority of the Lord of the Manor.

The Surveys also show, especially the 1755 one, that the economic and social changes of the Spa period had eroded much of the medieval system, hence the many "*don't knows*" of the unfortunate surveyors.

At the time when these Surveys were being made, Epsom and Epsom Common shared with Surrey, and indeed, with many other counties, an odiously bad road system. The Romans had, of course, built up a network of fine routes, of which one in our vicinity was Stane Street, but, all through the Middle Ages, the road surfaces had been dreadfully neglected, except in certain areas where the monasteries, or an enlightened secular Lord, had attempted to maintain some of them; no central authority had, however, taken responsibility for them. It was always supposed to be the duty of parishioners to organise road-mending. The Commonwealth government in the 1650s was the first to take this matter seriously, and it attempted to establish a compulsory nation-wide tax for road maintenance. All the legislation passed in the Commonwealth years (1649 - 1660) was declared invalid when the Restoration put Charles II on the throne, but, even if this tax had given the government financial assets for roadworks, knowledge of the science of road-making was literally non-existent. Accidents were frequent. In August 1649, a month when roads should not have been too difficult, John Evelyn went to Woodcote for the marriage of his brother, Richard, and the coach carrying the bride and bridegroom overturned on the way from the church to the party. John with characteristic and casual brotherliness noted "no harm was done", but harm, of course, constantly came of such events.

Until well into the 18th century, the attitude of most people, whether in authority or not, was that long-distance traffic, and traffic carrying heavy loads, created an intolerable and destructive burden on any stretch of road, so that every effort was made to limit such business. It is impossible to pretend that, in the 1980s, no vestige of this attitude to through traffic can be detected in Epsom's residents.

From the end of the 17th century onwards into the 18th, the Turnpike Trusts slowly began to make some improvements, each such Trust deriving its authority from an individual Act of Parliament,

empowering it to undertake work on a certain route, and literally thousands of Acts of Parliament were passed in this process. The Trusts were given the name Turnpike because they were permitted to establish tollgates on their roads; each tollgate was built and manned so that a gate across the road might be supervised, and this was the turnpike. If you wanted to get through it, you had to pay your toll to the tollkeeper. These roads, built by the Turnpike Trusts, were main routes, and they did constitute a very marked improvement on what had gone before. Nevertheless, the tollgates and their keepers came to be hated and resented. Local roads serving small places remained abominably bad.

It has already been emphasised that business for Epsom Spa thrived only in the summer seasons, but many people other than those involved in that early form of the tourist trade suffered from the awful state of roads in winter. Farmers couldn't shift their loads, nor could timber merchants, or dealers in coal, china goods, foodstuffs or anything else. There was good farming land in Surrey which was not worked at all because of this problem of inaccessibility to markets and customers. As late as 1750, the people of Horsham petitioned Parliament for a road to London by Coldharbour, Dorking and Epsom. They declared that if they wanted to drive to London, they had to go down to the coast and travel round to Canterbury. Later still in 1825, Pownall recorded that the distance from Epsom to Esher and Claremont did not exceed 6 miles, but, for want of a proper road, the traveller had to go via Ditton, thereby increasing the distance to 9 miles. *"We are very much surprised a good line of communication has not been formed between Epsom and Esher"*.

Until the great road-building era which began in the mid-18th century, people who had to travel did so in the main on horseback, and in order to avoid bog and mud, they tended to go by winding routes along the higher contours. Some of the old, abandoned bridle paths can still be seen in Surrey along the hillsides, and very agreeable they are to both country ramblers and bird-watchers.

It seems that the road from Epsom to Dorking, the earlier stretches of which cross the Common, was one of the first in our vicinity to be improved. Peter Brandon, in his excellent 'History of Surrey', quotes the 1720 edition of 'Britannica Depicta', which records a road from London to Arundel, going through Epsom across the Common and over the Mickleham Downs to Dorking. In 1755, the road between Epsom and Horsham was at last made up through the Turnpike system. Thereafter the main roads across Surrey began to improve, but by 1805 local and minor roads were still as ever before, impassable in bad weather and throughout the winter.



A final glimpse of the Wells area by Schellinks. Most of the visitors would arrive on horseback owing to the poor roads, and in the main print on page 19 can be found 15 horses, along with 47 people, 10 dogs and a flock of sheep. Some impromptu horse-racing seems to be taking place, and the man watching whilst holding two further horses is perhaps waiting for his companion.

This section on the 18th century cannot be concluded without reference to one of the most famous residents we have ever been able to boast. This of course was 'Eclipse', the marvellous horse, foaled during the great eclipse of the sun in 1764. The Duke of Cumberland's claims to notoriety are varied, but one of his greatest distinctions was that it was he who bred 'Eclipse'. This horse won an inordinate number of races, in fact, every one for which he was entered, and he was deemed to be one of the finest runners ever. In the last race for which he was entered, his odds were 70 to 1 on, and after that he ceased to race, and stood for stud for 11 years; he sired many future Derby winners. He was bought by a man named Dennis O'Kelly, known as Colonel O'Kelly, who became exceedingly rich and built a splendid and elegant residence for himself in about 1785 on Clayhill,

later renamed West Hill, probably on the site of the present Kingswood House School for Boys. Certainly Kelly's establishment was almost opposite the coachhouses of Hookfield, which still stand on the crest of West Hill.

O'Kelly had advanced ideas on stabling, and there is a fine account of his property, written by P. Edwards in his itinerary work 'The Journey from London to Bright-helmston', published in 1801- "*In the front of the house is an elegant drawing room, 40 feet by 20 feet, with gardens, shrubbery and stabling. There are 35 paddocks for his large stud of stallions, brood mares, colts and fillies....Here I was entertained with a sight of Eclipse*". Reginald White, in his book 'Ancient Epsom' (1910) rarely exposes his inner feelings, but in quoting this reference to the horse of horses, he was too deeply moved for reticence to be bearable. "*o! Casual and unresponsive scribe*", wrote White, "*who was entertained with a sight of the famous Eclipse and was satisfied to dismiss the subject in 9 words*". White goes on to tell us that, in this desirable residence, O'Kelly entertained H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland, Lord Egremont, Lord Grosvenor and many other "*noble notaries of the turf*".

No visible or recognisable structure is left of O'Kelly's palatial home or of his stables or paddocks. Nearer the town, 'Eclipse House', formerly a public house, is all there is to remind us of one of our most respected residents. The neighbouring West Hill House, which was built in the 17th century, was much neglected before it was destroyed during re-development in 1979 and 1980; a replica was designed and began to be erected in the later months of 1980. A small rectangular cover conceals the original well, surrounded by a wrought-iron fence, in Well Way. So changed in appearance are the areas around the Wells and West Hill that it is almost impossible to envisage what it was all like in the heyday of their splendours, nor have we any substantial remaining evidence of the Brickfield's prosperity, apart from some shallow pits near 'The Jolly Coopers'. In the western High Street we do, however, still have some of the Spa period buildings, including the magnificent Assembly Rooms, still reasonably intact.

3 Epsom Common in the 19th Century

In a work entitled 'A General View of the Agriculture of the County of Surrey', published in 1794, William James and James Malcolm had some acid remarks to pass upon the sour nature of Epsom Common-

"The soils are loams and clay upon gravel...much the greater part is covered with furze, brambles, hawthorn bushes, large quantities of hornbeam and other pollards: other parts are a sour, wet pasture. It is much to be lamented that a tract of land, such as is here described, adjoining the town of Epsom and equal in quality to any of the circumadjacent enclosures should at this period remain in such an unprofitable state. We have no difficulty in saying that this land is capable of yielding all kinds of grain and timber and if enclosed would fetch 5/- to 35/- per acre."



This was written when common lands had been increasingly exposed to the danger of enclosure for very many years, partly because there were the usual complaints about people dumping rubbish and filth on them, partly because they attracted Vagrants, home- less people living rough - and indeed in the 1970s and early 1980s such people were still eking out an existence in this way on Epsom Common. Mainly, however, it was because landowners could not resist encroaching upon the commons in order to make money out of them. Mr. James and Mr. Malcolm were, of course, grossly exaggerating when they claimed "*with no difficulty*" that "*all kinds*" of grain and timber could be cultivated. During the Napoleonic wars, no attempt was made to cultivate the Common, and, until well into the 1850s and 1860s, the area remained much as it had been since the collapse of the Spa.

Messrs James and Malcolm were representative of the drive to improve farming in the late 18th century which in most places led to enclosure of the common fields and most of the waste. It was mainly due to the fact that Epsom was by 1800 a rich residential market centre rather than a farming village and its landowners had other interests, that there was no great pressure to enclose in Epsom. The Common remained unploughed and unenclosed while the common fields, although largely unenclosed, were in fact to a great extent, by arrangements between landlords, parcelled up into large single owner sections and some shots and some strips built over while others were given over to market gardening. Only as late as 1869 was Epsom finally enclosed, and then the common lands remained as units in private hands, but with the remnants of rights of common surviving both on the Downs and on the Common proper (or the Lower Common as it came to be called).

The famous English landscape painter, John Constable, is known to have visited Epsom during the years 1805 to 1811 staying with his Uncle, James Gubbins, who rented the house called 'Hylands' in Dorking Road. While staying at Pitt Place in 1831 with his friend the owner Sir Digby Neave, he made water colour drawings of the house. In the National Gallery hangs his small oil painting of Epsom Common.

The Population Act of 1811 promoted an enquiry which gives interesting insights. Amongst Kingston-on-Thames, Guildford, Dorking, Reigate and Epsom, Kingston was the most populated with just over 4,000 inhabitants, Reigate the least with 1128. Epsom came fourth with 2515 people living in 397 houses, which were occupied by 481 families, with 6 uninhabited dwellings.

Very few of these people could have been living on our Common. The lack of any significant river, and of minerals, meant that no major industry could develop in neighbourhood. Access was still by roads too Poor to be used in winter. James Malcolm's 'Compendium of Modern Husbandry' (1805), another work characterised by the abrasive undertones of this author, describes Surrey's local roads as being "*as bad as some of those in the most inaccessible and uninhabited parts of Ireland*".

Improvement in these local roads came very gradually during the 19th century and did not reach the Common till the 20th, but main routes developed well enough for carriers to establish reasonably reliable service in the transport of goods - indeed people continued to use the carriers for quite a long time after the railways had begun opening of the countryside. Before giving some account of those railways which affected our Common, reference must be made to a most attractive scheme which never came into being. It is too interesting and bizarre to omit. In 1825, rival plans were drawn up for the construction of a 'Grand Imperial Ship Canal' to link London with Portsmouth. Sailing round by sea could take up to twelve days, and it was estimated that "*the largest ships afloat*" would use this canal and thus be able to make the journey in less than 24 hours. Fresh food and farm produce could be brought to London, bypassing the awful local roads, shipwrecks could be avoided, and, in time of war, should such arise, goods and equipment could be taken to the naval base at Portsmouth rapidly and without risk. George Rennie and his brother, John the Younger, submitted plans for this splendid project.

Their prospectus detailed an 86 mile stretch of canal, 300 feet wide, 24 feet deep, from Deptford via Merton, Chessington, Epsom Common, Guildford, Alford and Loxwood to 'the Arun valley, thence to Langstone Harbour: estimated cost, £7 million. A rival set of proposals took the canal by a slightly different route on its southern reaches, but this too would have crossed Epsom Common, entering at a point most oddly described as "The Gate on Epsom Common". The whole thing however came to nothing and created little other than recrimination between the rival builders. One can't help regretting this. The vision of large ships placidly crossing our Common and passing all those bramble bushes, crab- apple trees, wild roses and furze patches is very attractive.

What did materialise of course was the railway, a much more mundane concept to us, but an equally astonishing one to the people who saw their first train. As early as 1846, the company (independent, but under L.S.W. Rly. benevolence), issued a fascinating series of maps showing what areas they would need to acquire in order to build their new railroad. The relevant section of the sequence for us is the one dealing with Ashted and Epsom Commons. The length proposed over the Commons was precisely one mile and 17 chains, a chain being 66 feet. Incidentally, this map shows the Brickfield and marks its kilns, plus sheds, out-buildings and cottages, all of which property was ascribed to "*the Misses Willett*"; it was tenanted William Chase, Morris Andrews and John Craddock Andrews, who occupied the premises, with their sub-tenants, Charles Ede and Edward Kitcherside.

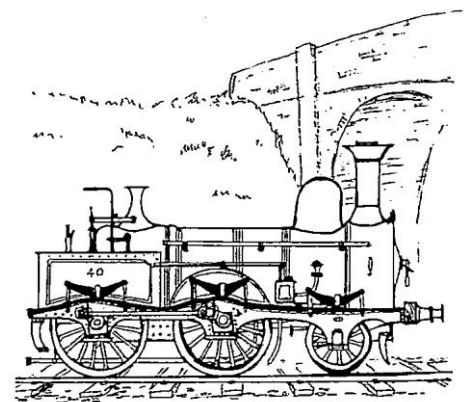
Each railway line required a special Act of Parliament, and to secure the passage of such an Act took time. The line to Leatherhead crossed Epsom Commons almost exactly as the map of 1846 had indicated. The highest part was through the huge cutting in the centre of our Common, and it must have been a tremendous scar when it was first formed. About 30 chains (660 yards) to the summit was "*Lady Howard's private crossing*". The Surrey Gazette' for August 26th 1851 published an advertisement to those having a claim on the London and Portsmouth Railway Company for loss of grazing rights, the sum (totalling £258) to be divided among the tenement holders concerned. Presumably something similar happened when a line was eventually built across the Common, absorbing something like 6-7 acres of it.

The originally independent Epsom and Leatherhead Railway was incorporated in 1856, but its scheme had the blessing of the nearby London and South Western Railway Company. The ELR never

had any stock or locomotives of its own, and by the time the single line was opened in February 1859, an agreement had been reached whereby the LSWR would work it. The line was still isolated at its opening, but connected to the adjacent Wimbledon line of the LSWR in April and to the London Brighton and South Coast Railways' Croydon line in August of the same year. In 1860 ownership was transferred to these two larger companies jointly.

During the 19th century, an increasing number of maps was produced in many districts, and these are much more reliable than earlier ones. In the 1840s, a series of so-called Tithe Maps was published to establish the dues payable to the church. A Tithe map of Epsom (a small part of which is reproduced opposite) came out in 1843. It was made to a scale of 3 chains (66 yards) to the inch. It was done in several colours and showed by number every building, field, orchard and Meadow in Epsom with a separate analysis to record the names of the owner and tenant, plus the sum due to the vicar in tithe, for each piece of property. Study of this huge map yields far too much information to record in full here: it can be seen at the Surrey Record Office, County Hall, Kingston (NB NO LONGER CORRECT) and there is a copy at Epsom Library, with a transcript of the key made by DR. H. R. Lehman.

Above right, The Seal of The original Epsom and Leatherhead Railway, with the rural aspects of its area showing some poetic licence. The locomotive seen here is typical of those used a few years after the line's opening, shown by Wells Road bridge over the cutting. It was built in 1854 for the LBSCR as shown, but rebuilt in 1871 with closed cab and then named 'Epsom'.



The map below shows how sparsely populated Epsom was at the time. Large fields in a circular area lay where the Greenway houses and gardens now exist: they were worked from the Old Wells Farm near the site of the famous spring. Near the corner where Wells Road turns sharp left towards the present row of shops, there was a windmill and nearby, cottages and gardens, held by George Ede, owned by John I. Briscoe. For this mill and its adjacent properties £3. 2. 6d. went annually in tithe. Other than these there were no dwellings in this part of the Common.

The Brickfield, to which reference has already been made on page 20, is shown near 'The Jolly Coopers' 'Andrew's Brickfield' features in later years as a known land-mark in the 1888 deeds of 'The Jolly Coopers'. By the end of the century it had been taken over as a farm, worked by George Oakshott, who kept pigs there but it obviously had a long and useful life.

Hookfield, owned by Randolph Knife and occupied by John Winstanley, appears on the Tithe Map as a sizeable estate, very clearly hook-shaped. Hook is a fairly common place name for spurs of land tapering to a point. There was a fine house there with adjacent farm buildings and fields.

Round the edges of the Common, and on limited parts of Stamford Green, there were groups of cottages, mostly paying 2/- in tithe, with frequent listing of orchards meadows, walled gardens and pastures. Some of the cottages are said to have been built to accommodate retired service men after the Napoleonic Wars.

Beside Stamford Green Pond, 'The Cricketers' is marked, under the name of Stamford Cottage. It had been sold to Edward Gregory and William Croft Fish in 1836 for £235 and it became a public house around the middle of the century. In those days, and even till the 1920s and 1930s, the pond was

much larger than it is now, and came right up to the wall of the building (see photo. page 31). The Great Pond, on the further side of this part of the Common with its straight edge along the dam, is an interesting item on the map; it is outlined and coloured in pale blue, as are all the numerous and smaller ponds.

Much more could be said about the 1843 Tithe Map, given space, but one thing cannot go unstressed. Amongst the names of owners and tenants occur a number which one meets again in parish registers at the end of the century and some even in Directories, War Memorials and Electoral Rolls in our own century. Examples are: Stone, Bailey, Ede, Furnish, Spokesman, Chandler, Ratcliffe Kitcherside, Andrews and Skinner. The recurrence of these and other surnames for well over a century suggests quite an impressive social continuity.

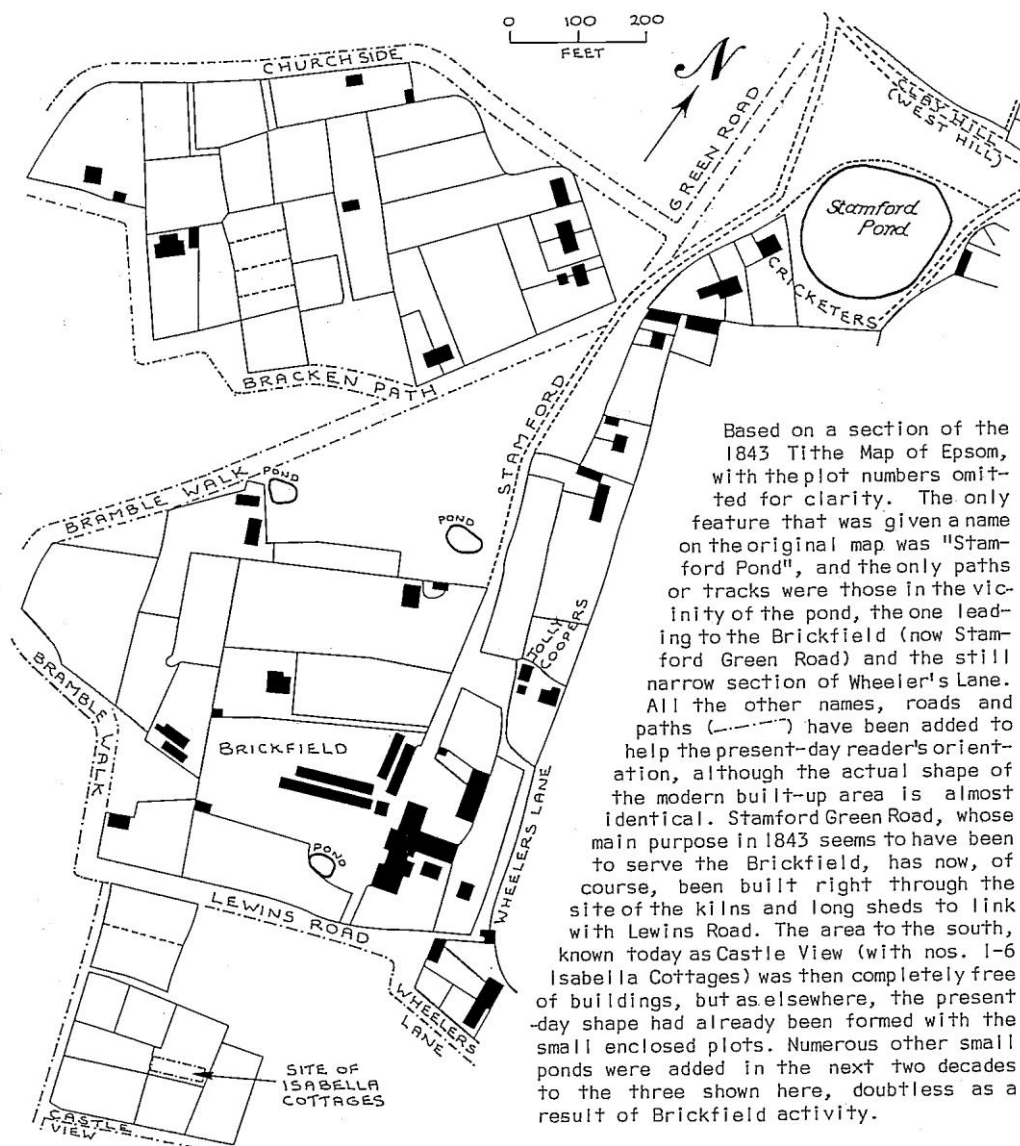
The Ordnance Survey Map the result of surveys in 1866 and 1867 again shows the Brickfield, marked as such, Hookfield Park and Epsom Court as stately homes, Christ Church as a Chapel of Ease, the Union Workhouse near the site of the present Epsom District Hospital, and 'The Cricketers as a public house. The circle of fields round the Greenway has no additional dwellings, and again there are a number of small ponds including those on each side of Wilmerhatch Lane by Woodcote Park.

Two significant new features are worth comment. The Great Pond does not appear on the 1866 O.S. map -its site is indicated by a huge elliptical basin. Nobody so far has been able to produce an adequate explanation of this, but the dam had obviously been breached, and it is believed that somebody had drained it; after 1843 in order to secure additional pasture (see also pages 31 and 42)

The other new feature is the line of the railway, driven across the Common just south of the Wells area, and completed in 1859. One wishes there were known records of the commotion on this part of the Common caused by the construction of this stretch of railroad. Beside the line, the 1866 map shows Woodlands Road, with a small number of cottages, which were much older than the railway and which were also marked on the 1843 Tithe map- almost certainly these little houses and gardens represent encroachment on the Common.

There were revisions of the 1866-1867 map in 1895 and 1915. The later editions show a Mission Hall at the end of Woodlands Road, which in 1908 was consecrated as a church. Neither of these later editions show any further building in the district around the old Well, though, elsewhere on the Common, more cottages had been put up in the 1890s and early 1900s, but among the existing cottages and gardens.

The windmill, near the corner of Wells Road and some 300 yards north east of the Old Wells Farm, which appears on the maps of 1843 and 1866, is thought to have been built in the 1790s. Nobody can deny that it was well sited for catching the prevailing winds. In 1818, it was tenanted by Mr. Isaac Ridge, miller and baker. The property included 2 acres of arable land, piggeries and a baker's shop, and it yielded a rent of £74.18. It was up for sale in 1818, and listed among its assets were a 12 bushel oven, capacious bins, a "*Building Mill, Sack Tackle, Smut machine and Flour Machine with shaking screens*". The Sail carried eleven yards of canvas and there was a cast-iron neck and head to the windshaft.



Altogether it seems to have been an unusually large mill, capable of dealing with a lot of business, but it came to a dramatic and untimely end, shortly after the sails had been re-tarred, probably in 1880. Although the year of the disaster is uncertain, the day of its occurrence is not, for it was on Oaks Day that the mill caught fire and was burned to the ground. The crowds which flocked to watch the blazing sails revolve were so large as to resemble a race meeting. An issue of 'The Epsom Herald' in the early 1950s records the 91st birthday party of one of the Ratcliffe family who vividly remembered the fire and described it with some considerable sadness.

An important development for our Common came in the 1870s. Reference has already been made to "*Stamforde Chappelle*", a medieval place of worship, destroyed or abandoned at some unknown date before the Spa period. In 1843, a new chapel of ease was built on a site given by the Lord of the Manor, Mr. J. I. Briscoe, between 'The Cricketers' and the main road. It proved too small however, and so Elizabeth Trotter took action. She lived at Horton Place and was a well known benefactress. She had been exceedingly generous to the Infants School on Clayhill where many of the Commoners children started their education. In 1867 she left £8,000 to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for the building and endowment of a church and parsonage for the Common, with the forthright stipulation

that services were "*to be devoid of the Follies of Ritualism*". And so Christ Church was built. It was consecrated in 1876, and there is a spirited account of the proceedings in the Centenary booklet written in 1976 by Mr Harry Jackson, the Church Warden. On the site of the former chapel of ease there is now a small hall, which is used as a Scout Hut.



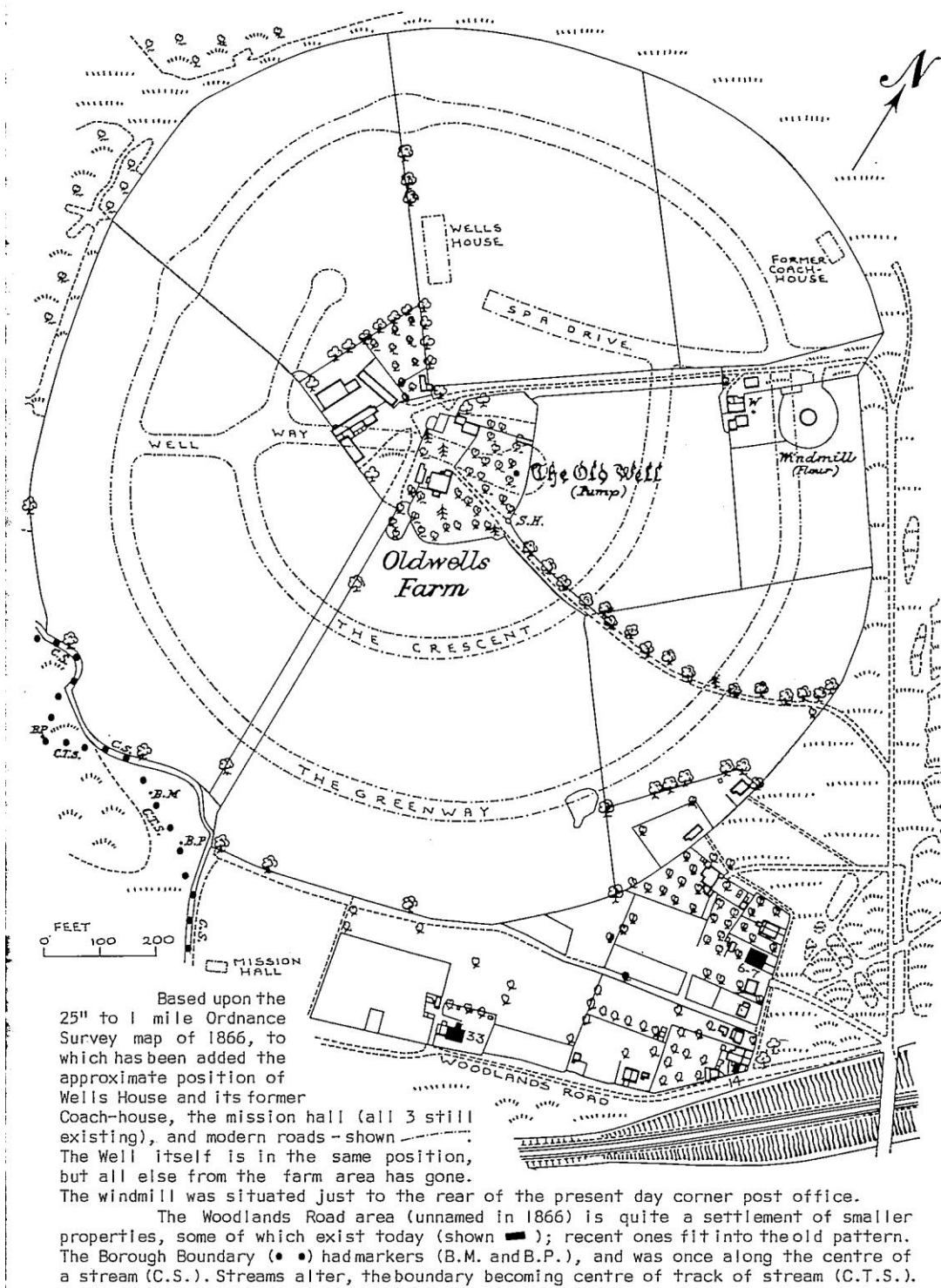
A boot scraper of cast-iron, one of which exists at each door of Christ Church. They were essential everywhere in Victorian times, but especially on Epsom Common.

Judging by the Parish Registers, the congregation consisted in the main of exactly the people for whom Christ Church was meant, the labourers, gardeners, carpenters, railwaymen, plumbers and bricklayers who lived nearby, although an impressive number of worshippers was attracted from Epsom town as well: quite a contingent came, for example, from Adelphi Road. There were also gipsy families who had their babies christened there. The racing community and the professional middle class did not live on the Common, nor it seems did they attend Christ Church. Some of the notable well-to-do families, however do appear in the Parish Registers, and are still remembered by older residents - the Northeys, for example, the Bralthwaites who owned

Hookfield, and Mr. J. Stuart Strange who was Lord of the Manor in the latter years of the 19th and the early ones of the 20th century. Lord Rosebery was a regular worshipper at Christ Church and he and Lady Rosebery used to walk over from the Durdans, where they lived, for Evensong. The Gladstones often spent the weekend with them and they attended Evensong too. Mr. Frank Martin (aged 89 in 1980) relates how his elder sister used to wait on a Sunday evening at the end of the lane for this party to go by on the churchyard route, because Mrs. Gladstone wore such a beautiful gold chain - it went twice round her neck and tucked in at the waist. Mr. Martin's sister bought one like it when she grew up, and it became a treasured family possession. Poor Lord Rosebery suffered from insomnia, and there are still people living on the Common who recall how his coachman used to take him for quite long drives during the night, when his sleeplessness became intolerable.

In 1881, Canon Archer G. Hunter began his long period as Vicar of Christ Church, and he and his wife worked with unflagging energy to care for the people in the parish. They both visited regularly, especially when people were ill, they organised various forms of poor relief, they arranged outings for the children, they entertained in their enormous Victorian vicarage and, above all, they gave the greatest care to the maintenance of the year's services. The organist, George Good, appointed in 1876, was another of the same quality, and the partnership of these three made Christ Church a powerful influence. The children were rounded up for Sunday School too and most of them grew up to attach great significance to regular church-going.

In 1880, the Epsom Common Working Men's Club was founded, through the initiative and at the expense of Mr. Strange, the Lord of the Manor. Such clubs and institutes were being set up at this period in many parts of the country, to contrive for working men facilities for an active social life. The Club was well designed, well built and according to Andrew's Epsom Directory of 1895, "*handsome and commodious*". Like the other similar clubs, it served snacks and drinks, including alcohol. It became a central



organisation for Common-dwellers and in later years it organised convalescent holidays for members who needed them. From early years it sponsored very popular and well-supported cricket matches, children's outings, and celebrations of all sorts; Christ Church Sunday School met on its premises and it became a daytime haven for people in bad times, like the dreadful winter of 1898, when unemployment was widespread. While the initial capital came from the founder, funds were augmented in the early 1880s by "capital entertainments" which were laid on, often at 'The Spread Eagle'. 'The Surrey Gazette' records one such, when "a local amateur troupe" took part, with Mr.

Good the organist presiding at the piano, and half a dozen Christ Church choirboys strengthening the choir - "every seat on both nights was filled". In 1895, the honorary secretary and treasurer was Mr. Henry Willis who lived at Horton Place. Later on management of the Club passed into the hands of the members themselves, and in the end they bought it with their own funds. There were upwards of 200 members in the decade before World War I, and more than twice as many in the 1970s. The Club still thrives as ever, and membership is much sought after, though, to the deep regret of older residents, the cricket matches have declined.

The Victorian style Working Men's Club building, with a slightly more recent pseudo-Tudor pair of houses, and two older cottages with weather-boarded upper storeys beyond. Three vastly different styles and eras of building, all facing Stamford Green.



There must have been mixed feelings in Epsom about Mr. Strange. Of course, he commanded immense respect because he was Lord of the Manor, and a very wealthy landowner and because he was loyal to Christ Church. The Working Men's Club proved such a success that Mr. Strange would have been much admired for helping to launch it. He was the object of furious criticism however in 1888. 'The Surrey Gazette' for May 17th of that year records that Mr. Strange had closed a footpath leading over the Common in front of his residence, a fine new establishment he had built for himself on a site near the yard of Old Wells Farm. As this was a right-of-way, he was officially asked to re-open the path, and presumably did so. In the very same month, the "*Freeholders, Copyholders and inhabitants*" of the manor and parish of Epsom were petitioning against Mr. Strange because of the erection of posts and chains, the paving of turf, the removal of fern and gorse, up beside the New Stud on the Downs, all to improve facilities for the horse-racing. The Epsom Court Rolls of the century record many cases of encroachment on the Common, "*near the Wells*", and around the verges, not to mention cases of complaint because people were pasturing more sheep than they were allowed. All this made for constant friction between the Lord of the Manor and his tenants. No affair promoted such outraged, well-organised protests from the Commoners as Mr. Strange's plans for the area by the Grandstand. The people enjoying rights of common on the Downs were most articulate about the risk to themselves and to those living on the Lower Common listed as 433 acres, Clayhill (4 acres), Stamford Green (6 acres) and Woodcote Green (7 acres). They set out the traditional rights of pasture, estovers and turbary and protested to Mr. Strange that they had "*observed with a feeling of dismay various acts performed on the Commons, which in themselves constituted encroachments upon their rights and appear to be an assertion of a right on your part to do as you will with the Commons without consulting the Commoners*".

The Lord of the Manor admitted the claim in relation to pasture for sheep but denied the claim for estovers. The case did not go to trial and in the end, of course, the race horses and their supporters won. Lord Eversley, Chairman of the Commons Preservation Society, recorded sadly "*since then the relations between the Lord of the Manor, the Commoners and the inhabitants of Epsom have been in*

a state of tension". The Epsom Commons Preservation Committee was at once formed to safeguard the Commoners from further encroachments.

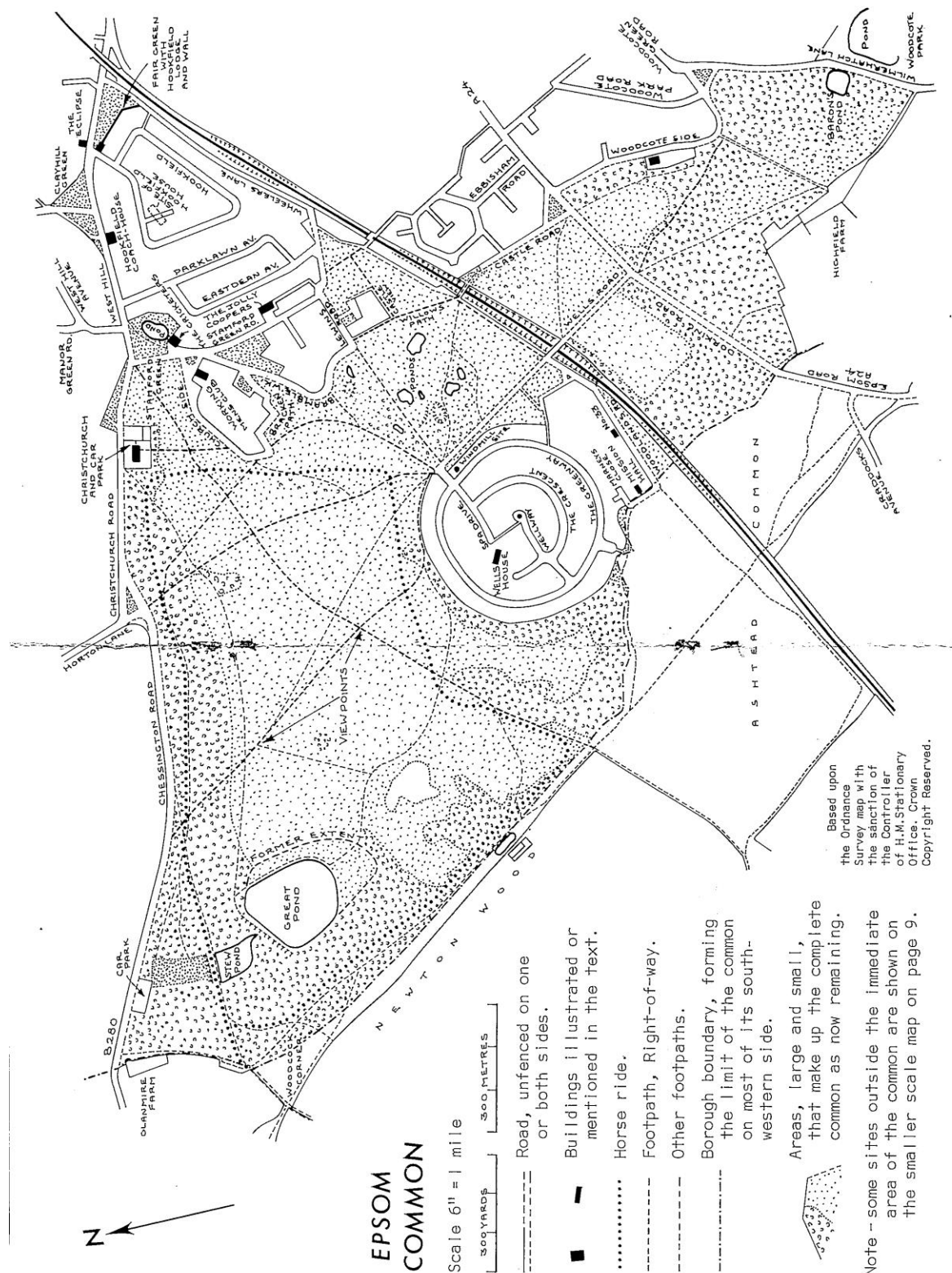
While the row about the improvements by the race-course was in full spate Mr.Strange carried through another business deal. In 1889 he leased "*the area, now dry, formerly known as the Great Pond*", for a period of 14 years, at £8.0.0. a year to Mr. Thomas Skelton, the younger who was a vet. Mr.Skilton was to have the use of the 12.587 acres, together with the "*sheds and other erections, excepting all timber and other trees, pollards, spines and saplings, likely to become timber*". Mr.Strange was to continue to enjoy exclusive rights of "*shooting, sporting and preserving Game, Rabbits, and Wild Fowl*". Mr. Skilton was to keep hedges and ditches in good repair, and he was to leave "*upon the said premises all the unspent hay, straw, clover, fodder, turnips or other root or green crop, muck, dung and compost, produced or made on the said premises for the benefit of the Lessor*". It is perhaps significant that in the 1890s, Mr.Strange resided in Winchester.

From the 19th century local newspapers, such as 'The Surrey Gazette' , one can collect much information about our Common and there is space here to note only a fraction of it. For example: an annual sheep-shearing match and cattle-show was held on the Fairfield, Clay Hill, by the Surrey Agricultural Association in June: about three weeks later, the traditional annual Wool Fair would take place of ten in the grounds of the 'King's Head Hotel. Clayhill was later renamed West Hill, while the site of the 'King's Head' where Pepys had stayed in Spa days, has since 1958 been occupied by the shopping precinct Kings Shade Walk.

'The Epsom Journal' tells us that in 1874, 'The Cricketers' applied for a renewed licence. This was strongly opposed by Mr.Donaldson, the vet, who lived next door and declared that the Inn created "*the greatest nuisance imaginable. I cannot come out of my house without being annoyed. The path that comes up to my house they nave a right of way over: their customers come out of a night and use my path and expose themselves, and, when I speak, they laugh at me*" The application was on this occasion refused, possibly because complaints about the noise created by Epsom's public houses were numerous at this time. Both parties to this dispute faced tragedy soon afterwards. A fortnight later, a baby girl, 11 weeks old, the daughter of 'The Cricketers" landlord, died. Fifteen months afterwards, the vet himself died, after retiring early from his profession owing to defective sight. He had been appointed "*at the beginning of the cattle plague*" Mr.Braithwalte of Hookfield was the uncle of Lilian Braithwaite, the actress. He lived until 1918, a very public-spirited and well-liked citizen, and his widow survived him for many years. They had a large house and extensive grounds which were sold up between the Wars, and the site is now thoroughly built over.



STAMFORD POND, 1898. Courtesy - Epsom Herald.



The beautiful Fair Green wall which marked part of his property's boundary still stands, and can be regarded as one of Epsom's more important architectural features, though the financing of its maintenance has been proving such a problem that one wonders uneasily how long we shall continue to enjoy it. The small lodge at the junction of Hookfield and West Hill also remains, and so does the block of coach-houses, almost on the crest of the hill, opposite the site of O'Kelly's former

property where the famous horse Eclipse passed some of his later years. In the 19th century, the road more or less petered out at Clay Hill, and became a difficult cart track. In May 1874, 'The Epsom Journal' reported that a four-wheel chaise, belonging to Mr. Braithwaite, was being driven by a groom when the horse was suddenly startled by the noise of a train, and bolted into the town, turned left at speed by 'The Spread Eagle', and ran into another chaise: the horse was badly damaged and so were both vehicles, though nothing was said about the two grooms involved.

The year 1879 was one of those terrible winters: for 38 years previously there had been no example of 6 months when Greenwich recorded such low temperatures every single day. In January it was noted by 'The Sutton and Epsom Advertiser' that some 12 or 15 more people than the proper limit had been admitted to the workhouse, because "*during the late severe weather, the workhouse authorities have not paid too much regard to red tape in admitting applicants for relief*". Tradition has it that when the ground was not deep frozen, such applicants used to bury any small sums of money they had on them before asking for a night's accommodation in order to avoid having to contribute to the cost. The workhouse, built it seems in 1839, stood on ground now in use by Epsom District Hospital. This hospital was opened in 1890, right beside the workhouse, which by 1949 was no longer used as such: its site was later incorporated into the hospital area.

The local press in the 1870s and 1880s throws light on the poverty suffered by Common-dwellers, who had great difficulty in finding cash for food and fuel. In 1875 one of them, who had been employed for many years by the London and South Western Railway was arrested in Wheelers Lane and charged with stealing 30lbs of coal, for which he was fined 20/- with costs of 14/-, or the option of a month's hard labour. Not having the money, he went to prison. There are cases of Commoners being fined for fishing in a pond, for poaching rabbits, for using unjust scales, for "*treading furze*", for "*removing manure*". This last crime was nothing new - people were being had up before the courts all through the 18th and 19th centuries for "*digging loam on Epsom Common*", for "*digging up the waste*", for "*clay digging*" even for removing stones and "*leaving the ground dangerous*". In the latter years of the 19th century the fines were usually 10/- to 20/-.

In 1879, during that appalling winter, a Commoner was sentenced to 21 days hard labour for taking a bag of coals worth 1/- at a time when his wife was ill "*under the doctor*". All these labourers would be earning about 15/- a week and struggling to bring up families on this income. Christ Church organised some distribution of food to the very poor, and the working Men's Club was generous as it could be. But the standard of living must have been well below the breadline, and it seems that magistrates had very little idea of the difficulties these people were facing.

Some improvement came at the turn of the century from what must have seemed a totally unpredictable quarter. In 1899, the Manor Hospital was opened, by the London County Council, for patients suffering from mental disorders. In 1902, the L.C.C. took over Horton Place, with its fine 17th century house which had been the property of Mr. Henry Willis, and this too became a hospital for mental patients. St. Ebba's and Long Grove Hospitals were established soon afterwards, and in 1924 West Park was opened. All these institutions employed large numbers of people - joiners, needlewomen, gardeners, cooks, agricultural workers, plumbers, launderers and so on, as well as male and female nurses. Thus, people on the Common found their services in demand and they had a wider choice of employment than formerly, at higher wage scales. New houses and cottages were put up to accommodate additional staff, so that the rural nature of our area was somewhat changed, more people came to live around the Common, and access to it from outside was very gradually improved, even though crossing it from one side to another, or even traversing one corner of it, remained a hazardous exercise in dirty weather. The essential way of life continued, however, to be more rural than urban, despite the increasing number of residents, until well into the 1930s, as the next chapter shows.

4 Early 20th Century to the Present Day

In the opening years of the 20th century, the small community living on or around our Common was very much more isolated than most of us realise today. The maps of the 19th century and the Directories of 1895 and 1899 show no evidence of roads over the Common except Stamford Green Road, and, apart from this, there were only tracks, vividly remembered to this day by the older residents. Those tracks were so clogged up with mud in winter months that the milk carts stopped outside the Working Men's Club and milk was delivered by hand-pushed barrows. When coal arrived on Saturday evenings, it took two horses to haul each coal sled up to the cottages around the present Bracken Path area, and both horses would be mud-bespattered up to the belly. There was a brewer in Wallington who delivered his wares on the Common and he employed boys, on Saturdays, to carry the crates, each holding four bottles of beer, because, like the dairy-men, he could not get his cart over the mud tracks in winter. These boys also did newspaper rounds and other odd jobs day in, day out, apparently with greatest good humour.

Tate & Lyle sugar boxes mounted on wheels formed a major part of the residents' normal transport for goods, though the shopkeepers and the more well-to-do had horses and carts. In the severe winters when ice and snow made life extra hard, the horses "*slipped and slurred*" all over the place and people wrapped sacking round their hooves. There were two blacksmiths in the town, one on each side of the High Street, and another near Horton, none so far as is known on the Common itself. For grazing one horse on the Common, you paid the Lord of the Manor 1/- a year. Some time, a History of Lost Property ought to be written. How did people contrive to lose horses? They certainly did so. The backyard of the Marquis of Granby was used as a pound for stray horses, and people had to pay 5/- for collecting them. One of our senior citizens remembers seeing this yard full of impounded horses during the years following World War I.

About eighty women on the Common took in laundry as a most important extra source of income, working in their own small cottages. They would rent two posts each on the Common at 1/- a year to fix up their drying lines - on Mitcham Common this was known as 'line rights'. One articulate and communicative 89-year-old recalls that his mother, who lived near 'The Jolly Coopers', had an agreeable arrangement with about eleven of her friends. They all managed, in summer time, to get their washing hung out by 9.30 on Monday mornings, and then they would put on large, clean, white aprons ("*you can have no idea how clean and nice they looked*") , and thereafter go across to 'The Jolly Coopers' for refreshments. Fortunately the Government did not devise licensing laws to control the hours for such goings-on till the early years of World War I. About 10 o'clock the barrel organ came, and the ladies would pass the time between dancing on the green and having the odd drink and a lot of chat, till 3 o'clock when they all went home to take down the linen and start the ironing.

In addition, there were several laundries which had considerable premises and employed many workers; the Kingswood was one of these in Woodlands Road, and the Snow White Laundry another. The Ratcliffe family ran one, too, and so did the Lewins, whose name (which derived from the Anglo-Saxon term for 'beloved friend') is perpetuated in Lewin's Road. The Drying Green near Lewin's Road is still mown in early summer for local children to use as a playground. The women worked very long hours in extremely trying conditions, for the laundry premises were filled with steam to the extent that you could not see through it, and the workers wore sacking aprons and solid boots, and they were dripping with dampness all day, working sometimes up to 8.30p.m., when they would go home to see to the family meal. The laundry was fetched and delivered on wooden, three-wheeled, slatted trolleys which took ferocious pushing and shoving in wintry weather, no doubt to the accompaniment of lurid exclamations.

The Common, like many another secluded community, had its so-called 'witch', still remembered, an astringent old lady, who took in laundry like the others, and, if she demanded help from local urchins to push her trolley up Wheeler's Lane, they dared not refuse. She ran a side-line in curing blisters formed by the heavy clogs people wore, using "*old fashioned remedies*", and she had the reputation also of doing no good to people's pets if they disturbed her poultry. Much more popular than this poor old lady was Nurse Axon, the District Nurse, always it seems a welcome visitor, though the midwife was regarded with awe, as she was a stern lady, who wore a black bonnet and a long black dress and carried a fearsome black bag. The midwife must have been pushed for time, as the babies were delivered at home and the families were very large, often some six to nine children, born in quick succession.

These families lived in rented cottages (at about 7/6d. a week) on the edge of the Common, near the Chessington Road (B280) area, around Stamford Green and near the pond by 'The Cricketers'. In those cottages there were two rooms upstairs and two on the ground floor, a lean-to kitchen at the back and an outside earth closet. How the families managed to eat and sleep, to suffer and get over illness, to witness birth and death, to keep their gear and pursue their activities, such as cooking, bathing babies, making do and mending, we in the 1980s will never understand. Some of the boys would sleep under the stairs, some children were sent across the road or round the corner to be brought up by grandparents. Beds accommodated two or three youngsters each. And those indefatigable women, the mothers, doing all that laundry, cooked and cleaned for those huge households, and most of them kept their premises spotless and their offspring good-humoured, although the cottages were served only by a cold tap. All the water had to be heated in old-fashioned coppers. Those cottages are, in many cases, still in use by children and grandchildren of these splendid families, and, as so many of the men are, or have been, builders, highly skilled modernisation has been carried out, and, thus, in the unchanged framework, one sees nowadays well-designed and excellently fitted modern equipment.

Money was in chronically short supply in the early days of the century, even though food, by our standard, was incredibly cheap. So almost everybody kept poultry. If you had sheep or pigs, you paid the Lord of the Manor 6d. a year per beast for grazing rights, and a cow cost you 1/-d.

The Common-dwellers were also great gardeners, cultivating small plots in front of their houses, many of which had been quietly enclosed from the Common. But they also had allotments, situated as they still are near the B280, almost opposite Stamford Pond. They paid the owner of this land, Mr. Braithwaite of Hookfield, 4/- a year for 10 rods, an area 90 feet long and 30 feet across.

Again, how did those men make time to cultivate even those tiny gardens and the allotments as well? The majority of them were labourers, working on building sites, road-building or sewage projects, up to twelve hours a day. Mr. Peter Cooper recalls that his father left home daily at 3.00 a.m., walked for three hours to work at East Molesey, where he was engaged on sewage works, and then walked home, taking twenty minutes longer than on the outward journey "*because he was tired*", and arriving at the house about 9.20p.m. At weekends Mr. Cooper helped George Oakshott to clean out his pig-styes, and also cultivated his own allotment. There were nine children in this family, and only one died in infancy. Mrs. Cooper worked a 12-hour day at Kingswood Laundry for 2/6. They all maintained good health and good spirits, and old Mr. Cooper lived to the age of 89. This was not exceptional. Common-dwellers were so long-lived that one of the local undertakers used to say that if you wanted to bury one of them, you had to go and shoot him first.

Finding enough food for such families was, of course, a problem, despite the allotments and the poultry - and, incidentally, how some of the smaller children hated "*those blessed old geese*", whose beaks were so well placed for nipping the calves of your legs!

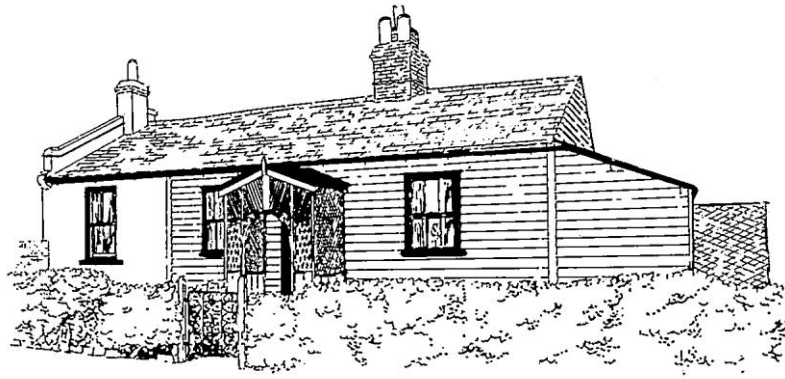
There were rabbits, of course, ever so many of them, until the myxomatosis period well after World War II. The trouble was that they belonged to the Lord of the Manor and you were not supposed to poach. Almost everybody did, and few were caught, partly because the boys could run so fast and, anyway, knew how to escape (in dry weather) via the huge pipes leading off the Common and under the railway by Wheeler's Lane; and partly because they were all so skilled. They used nets and dogs, or ferrets, or some-times their bare hands. Catapults were much favoured. One old man was immensely admired for his expertise with the catapult - he lived in the white house, near to 'The Cricketer', and on a Sunday afternoon he moulded his lead pellets while his wife read him 'Comic Cuts' *"to make a change since he couldn't read or write"*. From his upstairs window, this character could mortally hit a rabbit cleaning his whiskers under 'The Cricketers' sign.

It seems hardly credible, but it is emphatically stated, that in Derby Week *"most Common- dwellers"* made room to put up a bookmaker or a tipster, and some of these men came *"from as far away as York"*, and, declared our informant, *"it was lovely"*, because it made for such enjoyable variety from the usual routine. The children sang the tipsters' song

*"Our Epsom races have begun,
Now's the time to have some fun,
you've got money and we've got none,
Throw out your mouldy coppers."*

The fun was heightened by mounted police putting up at 'The Jolly Coopers' and at 'The Cricketers', where their horses were stabled. For housewives living on the Common, shopping was a good deal easier in some ways than it is now. On Wheeler's Lane near the railway there was Mrs. Emma Pennine's shop, mentioned in the Directories of 1895 and 1899. Her son and his wife and three children carried on with it, in the two hundred - year - old wooden cottage, which collapsed and had to be destroyed during the lifetime of Miss Dolly Pennies, who still runs a shop in a modern bungalow near the old site, and who represents the third generation in this business. In the 1920s, her parents met the 3.00 a.m. fish train from Grimsby twice a week, with their red-roan horse (called Ben) and their cart, and they also drove to London at least once each week, starting at 4.30a.m. And changing horses at 'The George' in Morden. They bought rabbits and much else at Smithfield, and they sold jellied eels, as well as fish, all sorts of groceries, sweets, vegetables and fruit. They made a bit on the side by trading in the rabbit skins. Between them they ran delivery rounds, taking the fish and the vegetables to people's houses, often quite late at night. There were two other general shops on the Common, and also a fish and chip shop, a baker and various stalls around the Stew Pond which provided cups of tea for the picnics and the hardy souls who went swimming there - a practice prohibited in the 1930s for well-authenticated reasons of hygiene. All these shopkeepers were much respected for their considerate business methods. The country's work force was by tradition paid late on Saturday afternoons, so if you were hard-up, your purchases were written down, and you went along to pay on Saturday evenings after 6.00 p.m.

There were bakers in the town who did quite a lively trade on the Common. One was known as 'the midnight baker' because he made his deliveries so late, often after 9.00 p.m. Another made a practice of cutting blocks of ice out of the Stew Pond in the depth of winter and storing it underground on his premises for later use in ice cream making. The winter of 1898 was as bad as that of 1879 and is still remembered with awe. It went on from November till March, everything was deep frozen, and all those builder's



The use of weatherboard cladding on timber frame is fairly common throughout the South - East, having come into favour in the late 18th century, but is little used elsewhere. It was mostly used for individual or semi-detached cottages, but there is, on the Common, at Castle View, an unusual terrace of 6, called Isabella Cottages. Also, bungalows were less popular, for the same reason as today - they cost more to build for the same number of rooms. This one on Woodcote Side is superbly maintained, and was originally symmetrical either side of its front door. Built in the first half of last century, it had a brick-built and rendered extension added to the south at a later date; owing to the mode of decoration it is little noticed at first. The trellis-work porch could date from soon after the turn of the century, trellis being once a very popular form of garden decoration which, with its lightweight construction and vulnerability to the elements, rarely survives many years. The small lean-to extension to the north might have been added not long after the property was originally built. (end of text for image)

labourers were consequently out of work, with no unemployment benefit. The shopkeepers told their customers to go on buying what they needed and to pay later on when the men got back to work. There was another appalling winter in 1937 when again all the ponds were frozen. An elephant was brought from Chessington Zoo, and the poor beast was marched across the ice on the Stew Pond with Ivy Skinner on his back.

Talking with the older residents, one is impressed by the immense distances everybody used to walk in the early years of this century, and this goes for the women and the children as well as for the labourers such as Mr. Cooper. In World War I, women munition workers walked up to Tattenham Corner to load shells for the Ordnance Corps Munition Factory, walking back in the evening. Some of them even walked over to the Croydon market on Saturday evenings to buy goods whose prices were much reduced at that time of the day. The children walked to school and back twice a day as it was usual for them to go home for midday dinner, and many of them attended Pound Lane School, a tidy step for boys and girls living on the far side of the Common.

They were expected to take a significant share in adult work, but the children had no end of fun, making their own entertainment. They formed bands, using rattles and tins. They were magnificent at skipping, several children leaping together, with a long rope stretched right across the road and swung often by a couple of adults. They played cricket - girls, we are told, were as good as boys at this - and there was football, of course, as well as tipcat, hoops, jinny wagtail ("*a bruise - rendering game*"), marbles, conkers, hopscotch, dibs, tops and 1 Nicky Nicky Night, Show your light or the dogs won't follow'. The Common was everybody's playground and parents had no anxiety about this - there would be occasional fisticuffs, but violence and mugging as we know them were unheard of, and children even camped out at night in home-made tents without anybody minding. They went scrumping too for apples and pears. The Greenway, Manor Green Road, Park Lawn, East Dean, the

Court Farm area and West Hill Avenue all consisted of fields and orchards until the 1920s, and people led a real country life. Boys used to collect snipes' eggs, and also peewit's eggs, which 'the midnight baker', Old Sam, bought off them at 2/6d. for four, to sell "to the gentry". This money represented golden riches to those boys. The peewits gathered and bred on the area now forming the marvellously recreated Great Pond, where the children also gathered armfuls of cowslips. The junior schools sometimes organised a half day's brambling expedition on the Common, but the children knew exactly where to find quantities of blackberries and crab-apples on their own account.

Although these children had "*much more fun*" than the present generation - and older residents are quite emphatic about this - there were of course drawbacks to their life-style. There were bad times when they were hungry. A local newsagent in the 1930s handed out 12 halfpennies a week to the poorest paper-boys, who spent them on stale bread. One senior citizen recalls how, as a child, he discovered that he could buy dripping from Woodlands Hotel at 4d. a pound and sell it nearer home for 5d. a pound. As he says it was absolutely delicious; it is clear that he did not sell his whole stock, much as he wanted the pennies.

Children's infectious diseases were far more serious and prolonged in the early days of the 20th century than they are now. Whooping cough, measles and scarlet fever came regularly, almost in epidemics, and, in many winters, schools would be closed for up to two weeks at a time on account of illness. Mumps was very persistent too and there were endless colds and coughs. School buildings could be hideously uncomfortable, owing to local authorities being short of money to spend on maintenance, so that boilers did not always work, windows did not properly shut, and classroom temperatures were quite frequently as low as the middle forties Fahrenheit. No wonder that the staffs suffered from chest and throat complaints as well as the children. In really bad conditions of snow, attendance records showed a substantial falling-off, but facilities for the care of children at home were limited, and the ones who were ill must have suffered quite severely. As late as 1929 and 1930, diphtheria still featured in the absence lists and, on occasion, proved a killer.

Between 1875 and 1920, the Parish Registers record Common-dwellers' baptisms in 6 families of Coopers, 5 of Edes, 7 of Lewins, 10 of Manns, 9 of Parkers, 7 of Rowlands, 6 of Risbridgers, 5 of Ratcliffes, 7 of Suttons, 11 of Stones, 14 of Skinners, 10 of Warwicks and 8 of Wiltshires. In those 45 years, 18 children were baptised for the Edes, 28 for the Manns, 30 for the Ratcliffes, 38 for the Stones, 32 for the Skinners and 39 for the Warwicks. To take one example of the concentration of big families, in 1925 the houses between no. 20 and no. 50, Bramble Walk, had 45 children resident. Even though some babies died in infancy, boys and girls grew up with plenty of neighbours in whose company they were introduced to school, church and wage-earning, as well as to hardship, enjoyment, anxiety, sickness, adventure and friendship.

One of the highlights of the year was Bonfire Night, November 5th. The children, ably assisted by their elders, started gathering fuel for this weeks beforehand, and great mounds of dried wood, old chairs, dead gorse and other rubbish were built up, scrupulously guarded against marauding boys from Woodlands Road, who would pinch what they could get from these hoards, though the Stamford Green boys were equally game to remove the Woodlands Road dumps. There was a whole chain of bonfires on the great night and enormous fun; the girls blackened their faces and wore their brothers' clothes.

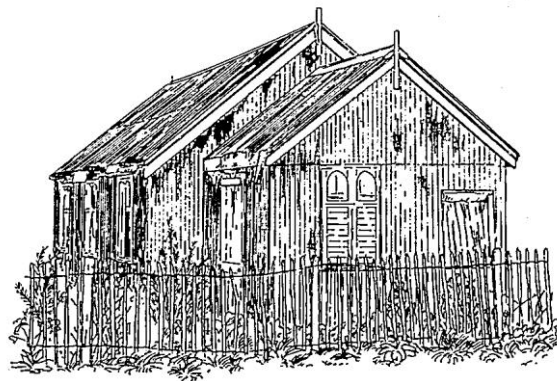
In the summer, the Working Men's Club organised outings for the children-nine coaches would go off to Brighton for the day and each child would be given 5/-pocket-money to spend. The Vicar of Christ Church and his wife organised outings, too, for the Sunday School. Epsom Fair, held every summer on the Fair Green by West Hill, was another annual treat of which we are now reminded only by the beautiful old Fair Green wall. Most of the fair-people were gipsies, and some became

popular local characters -Mrs. Marney, for example, who presided over a coconut stall, and whose funeral procession attracted a huge number of mourners from all over the country. The gipsies came and went for the most part, but there were some in fairly permanent residence, and Granny Elliott used to ask them in at Christmas; she thought this only right. People referred to the true gipsies by that name or as Romanies, and respected them for their considerate treatment of their horses. The hangers-on who were not considered true gipsies were known as 'pikies' or 'hedge-bumpers'.

The Common-dwellers were great dancers. They danced indoors and out whenever an occasion could be contrived; at the Annual Flower Shows, at functions organised by Christ Church and the Working Men's Club, on birthdays, on public holidays, at all sorts of times. Mrs. Polly Warwick, who celebrated her 100th birthday in 1973 and who lived till 1978, was a case in point. All through her long life, she was a great enjoyer, despite the fact that she had her full share of troubles; she is remembered on many counts, but mainly for her kindness to people in distress. She was one of those who would get up at any hour of night to go and help a sick neighbour. She was an apparently tireless worker, constantly singing and always game to join in the dancing. The whole community seemed to combine incredibly hard work with habitual enjoyment. Of course there were tragedies and miseries, but these too were shared. In the early part of our century, "*Epsom Common*", said one of our informants "*was all for one and one for all*". Everybody knew everybody, and people helped each other out when things went wrong.

Most of them were churchgoers. The men were faithful bell-ringers: skills in bell - ringing seemed to run in families, the Manns for example, whose daughters pulled away too, and the Oakshotts. The more tuneful boys became choristers. The famous George Good was organist at Christ Church for no less than 59 years from 1876 to 1935. In his heyday, there were 24 boy choristers, with a waiting list. Mr. Good devoted his life to Christ Church music, which became renowned, and he also promoted secular concerts of a high order, so the local people had unusually rich resources for enjoying music. In the late 1930s, the Christ Church Players made themselves famous too, and a fine variety of dramatic works was produced, in which members of the congregation were actively involved.

Christ Church, however, drew its congregation for reasons other than the music and drama it offered. Canon Hunter's long service as Vicar (1881 to 1911) made a lasting impact. He and his wife are still vividly remembered, with affection and admiration. Although, for one reason or another, none of his successors stayed in the parish as long as Canon Hunter, the Church continued to mean a great deal to the community on the Common. Those who lived on the far side, however, tended to worship at the little corrugated iron church at the end of Woodlands Road, dedicated to St. Michael in 1903, but in use as a Mission Hall for some 30 years before that: after 1956 its services were discontinued, but people still remember worshipping there.



ST. MICHAEL'S, WOODLANDS ROAD.

One outstanding character in these early days of our century, George Oakshott, worked the Brickfield Farm at the end of Stamford Green Road where he had a well-known herd of pigs. He was appointed Common Keeper by the Lord of the Manor, Mr. J. Stuart Strange. His duties included safeguarding the Common from the depredations of poachers (though he was known, in fact, to own ferrets himself). He also had to watch for bush fires and deal with them; these were quite numerous,

and hearsay has it that then, as now, children were by no means blameless in this matter. George Oakshott used to collect the dues from the Saturday market stallholders for the Lord of the Manor, and, late on Saturday evenings, he rounded up his children, later his grandchildren, and their friends and organised a huge scavenging operation, so that all was fresh and clean on Sunday mornings. He was charged, too, with the task of ensuring that gipsies did not settle too permanently or too numerous around the area, and he had a gift for this sort of negotiation and was positively liked by the gipsies, as well as by the residents on the Common. He had the qualities of leadership, without self-assertion, his influence was a strong factor in the development of the community, and this was widely acknowledged. He was a bellringer too, and so was his son Frank. Frank worked in the Post Office. As a young man he went to help at the scene of an accident, skidded on his motorbike, and in consequence lost a leg. Like their father, Frank and his brother Jack maintained the traditions established in the community, and brought up their children to do so as well. George Oakshott lived until 1935.

Men and women joined up during both World Wars, and Common-dwellers were represented in all the services, including the Navy. Of the 57 names on the Christ Church Memorial to those who died in World War I, 16 belonged to families whose names appear in the Parish Registers between 1875 and 1920 with addresses on the Common: in World War II, there were 7 out of a total of 58. A good many suffered serious injury, of course, and in the second war, these included civilians. Peter Cooper was caught one evening by blast from the first bombing raid on Epsom, when the area near the Club was damaged, and so was Peter.

In the extreme need of the World Wars, efforts were made to raise root crops or grain on many commons, and this was successfully done even in some areas of Dartmoor, so it is hardly surprising that parts of our Common were ploughed up. In World War II, some 144 acres were cultivated, mainly on stretches of land by the Dorking and Wells Roads, but also on some of the higher levels of the Common. The results were too poor to justify the continued infringement of traditional common rights or the prolonged legal processes which would have been required to maintain such cropping, once peace was declared.

Many of the survivors of the Wars returned home to the Common and lived in or near the houses where they were born. In the early 1920s, Church Side, Bramble Walk (originally known as Ede1s Orchard) and Bracken Path were made up into roads, and, from then on, new streets and housing estates began to appear all round the Common, swallowing up the old peripheral meadows and orchards. But the Electoral Rolls show that the traditional family names persisted amongst the new ones on the Common, and one realises that this is a community which continues to have a strong sense of belonging. As one eighty-year-old put it, all around her there are living the families of people who went to school with her and she declares that it is still true that everybody knows everybody and that people mind about each other. The shopkeepers certainly do, and they foster a lot of friendliness amongst their clients.

In 1932, Clay Hill Green was bought by the Urban District Council from the Graham family, and, four years later, the main Common was bought by the Council from the Lady of the Manor, Henrietta Langley Strange, the last of a long series of personal manorial owners; she was paid £4,000, and the Council became freeholders of the Common. The Lordship of the Manor was purchased in 1955, when the local authority also acquired the market franchise and the Fair Green. The rights of the Commons were thus vested in the Council as a corporate body.

A fine example of local initiative and voluntary effort is the Wells Social Centre, sited almost beside the Well itself. Early in 1972, after months of negotiation, a scheme was launched whereby the Borough Council would continue to own and maintain the Centre, but a Committee of local residents

would take over the routine management, leasing the premises. The immediate result of this was an increase in the use made of the Centre.

A play group which had been meeting three mornings a week extended this to five, a Youth Club from two evenings a week to three, Girl Guides and Townwomen's Guild accounted for a fourth evening, Scouts and an Old People's Club met there each week, not to mention the local Brownies, and later, the Wells Arts Group. Various groups hired the hall at weekends for dancing, parties and so on, and an Interdenominational Service became a well-supported monthly event.

It did not take the Centre's Committee long to see the need for repairs and alterations to the ceiling of the hall, and volunteers carried out these plans under the supervision of Mr. Alan Osborne, with the result that the heating at once became more effective. Success breeds optimism, and the Centre's next project was soon on the stocks - an extension at the rear of the building to provide a kitchen and greatly needed storage space. Plans for all this were approved by the Council, and again most of the work was done by volunteers, under the guidance of Mr. Osborne, who himself devoted an incalculable number of man-hours to the very exacting labour, and whose example stimulated many people to help. Meantime, money - raising activities multiplied among the residents to meet the inevitable bills. Professional help was called in to erect the walls, and, on a Saturday never to be forgotten by those who witnessed the procedure, the roof was completed.



Where to find cash for equipment and furnishings was a problem solved by two generous grants from the Jubilee Fund, set up in 1978. (It had already helped with cost of the main building work). The purpose of the Fund was to encourage young people to do voluntary work for the community, and the Wells Centre had done this in a big way.

The Centre is a near neighbour of Wells House, where the former Lord of Manor, Mr. J. Stuart Strange had lived. This Victorian building is now a home for handicapped children, and naturally enough, it is always short of money. To help the youngsters in their need, 'The Friends of the Wells House' group, inspired by Joe Bailey, was formed, in September 1974, and in 1975, a new venture made a considerable contribution to its funds. This was an Old Tyme Music Hall production devised by Harry Bell, the cast consisting entirely of local talent. It was a great success, and another entertainment of the same type was mounted in 1976, the proceeds this time going to the Social Centre extension fund. Later shows of various kinds have raised funds for equipment for the newly formed Arts Group and have, at the same time, created a mobile team which can put on entertainments at local hospitals, clubs for the handicapped and the like.

Fired by the example of the Old Tyme Music Hall, the younger members became involved in drama work under the Surrey County Council Scheme. They are now merged into the Wells Arts Group, whose artistic director is Harry Bell, and have played an import role in providing entertainment for the people of the Common and their friends, besides achieving fine results in drama festivals.

Another notable project which has enhanced the value of the Common for local residents and for very many others too was launched in the 1970s. Its origin may be linked with the recognition accorded to the area by the Nature Conservancy Council, which in 1955 declared Epsom and

Ashtead Commons jointly as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and, rightly indeed, for much of it remains almost unchanged and as it was centuries ago. The Parks Department of Epsom has organised some systematic care of Common, but since the early 1960s, horse-riding, motor-cycling and car-parking have become more damaging to footpaths and verges, and, as ever, the habit of dumping rubbish continued to spoil things. In the early 1970s, people even began driving their cars onto the Common itself. This development stimulated some extremely positive action in defence of the area.

In 1974, Mr. Ted Dowman of the Greenway and various neighbours founded the Epsom Common Association, in order to alert public opinion to the urgency of protecting the vegetation and wildlife of the Common, and also to devise practical ways and means of maintaining its beauty. This has met with success. The collaboration between the Borough Council and this voluntary organisation has led to the planting of more trees and to regular care of footpaths. Mr. Sellwood, the Borough Parks Officer, in co-operation with the Association, planned and laid out a perimeter horse-ride round the Common; this has contributed substantially to the preservation of footpaths, which are now much less churned up by riders, who enjoy the additional advantage of the pleasant and extended ride round the area. A nature trail has also been devised and has proved very popular during the annual Countryside Week which takes place on the Common each summer. More protection of verges and even some reduction of rubbish-dumping, have also been achieved.

Almost immediately after its foundation, the Epsom Common Association's Committee became involved in further plans for conservation, and these were centred on the site of the medieval Great Pond. Some explanation of the network of ponds is now called for.

Epsom Common has always been claybound, mud-bespattered and wet under foot, except in summers of severe drought, when it develops hardened fractures, ridges and potholes, and everything seems ironclad. In the early years of our century, there were many more ponds than nowadays, some sizeable, some smaller, no doubt in parts dug to win clay for brick-making and other purposes over the last 500 or more years. There was one, for example, at the near end of Bramble Walk and another at the far end, there was Blake's Pond outside Castle View, yet another by the Dorking Road near Castle Road and several more besides. One of the most interesting is Baron's Pond, opposite the entrance to Woodcote House, and so named after Baron de Teissier who lived at the house in the early 19th century. This pond was rescued from a weed-ridden and miry death by Mr. David Holmes, who repaired it with great skill during the 1970s, doing a major part of the work himself, with assistance from volunteers and co-operation from the Parks Department. There were also numerous underground streams.

In the early years of the century, the Lord of the Manor used to offer work in the two weeks preceding Christmas to any unemployed Common-dwellers, for digging and cleaning out the ditches - the wages thus earned were dubbed 'Christmas Dinner Money' and people were grateful for them. This practice made the Common somewhat less waterlogged in the early weeks of the New Year. When building projects and road-works began to multiply, waste material was dumped in the smaller ponds and they therefore disappeared.

It has already been noted that the Great Pond was drained between 1843 and 1867, probably by somebody wanting additional pasture, and that this character breached the dam which had been so skilfully built in the Middle Ages. In the early 1900s an overflow pond was developed between the Stew Pond and the B280, but this was eliminated by the Council in the early 1960s. The Stew Pond then remained as a solitary stretch of water, made popular however by the people who came fishing, picnicking and skating.

In January, 1975, the Committee of the Association, at the suggestion of Bob Dye, began to consider the possibility of re-creating the drained Great Pond. After consultation with the Borough Council, a feasibility study was undertaken by Bob Forster, a very experienced engineer who gave his services voluntarily. Plans were devised, drawings made and presented to the Council for approval: and work began in June, 1975.

As an engineering exercise, the project was much more demanding than lay people might suppose. With a catchment area of over 90 acres, all solid clay, great quantities of water flow into the pond during heavy storms, and this has to be contained, and the outflow controlled. The work necessary for achieving this could only have been done under the guidance of an expert engineer.

To restore the Pond, it was necessary first to clear out the mass of cluttered scrub growth, brambles, saplings of many varieties, wild roses, blackthorn, hawthorn and much else, in an area of over 6 acres. All this was cut down, piled up and later burnt by volunteer workers, and their labours were made possible by the tools from the Surrey Trust, acquired on loan through the good offices of the late Jim Payton.

For many reasons, but largely because the person who breached the dam over a century ago, or his friends or colleagues, drove a defective drainpipe through it, the work took four years to complete. Had the Great Pond project been carried out by contractors, the cost might well have reached some £8,000. Thanks to the magnificent leadership which brought in so many voluntary workers, and to the provision of skilled design work at no fee, it cost only £180, which was partly subscribed by the Association. It was a great encouragement that the Nature Conservancy Council made up the balance, on condition that the Pond was kept as a wildlife area.

The Great Pond is a beautiful stretch of water, covering about 6 acres. In the first ten months after its completion, it attracted a number of wild fowl mostly not seen in the area before, some of which stayed to breed; charming plants began to appear both in the water and round the verges. The project has been an immense success, and as such undertakings do, it has promoted many friendships.

Recognition of the Great Pond reconstruction has not been confined to Epsom residents, widespread as their expressions of congratulations have been. In November, 1980, came the news that the Civic Trust had awarded the Epsom Common Association a Commendation for this piece of work, a distinction which gave the Chairman and members of the Committee, together with all the volunteers who had worked so hard at this ambitious project, justifiable delight. There were 1,050 entries from all over the United Kingdom, mostly from fairly wealthy and prestigious organisations, of which only 150 were selected.

So our Common in the 1970s has witnessed skilled and highly successful projects, organised and completed by local people, both in the restoration of the Great Pond and in the promotion of all the varied work at the Social Centre.

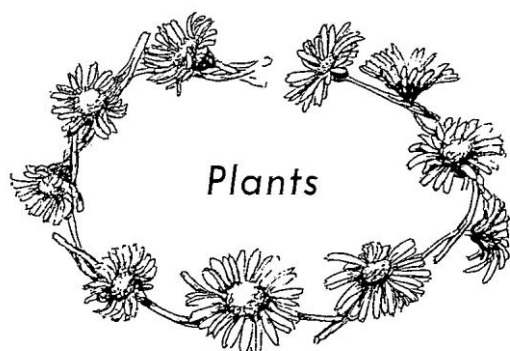
There have been many changes of late, and not all at ground level. British Caledonian Airways Ltd. has been flying helicopters between Heathrow and Gatwick since 1976. Twenty - one times a day, between 7.00 a.m. and 10.00p.m. , a rattling, roaring, machine lumbers noisily over the heads of the Common-dwellers, sometimes at alarmingly low levels. The pilots seem to use the line of shops at the Greenway as a signpost for a sharp, low change of direction, shattering even more the little real peace we are allowed. Should a tiny minority impose on the great majority? Alas, democracy!

But some things don't change. On an indescribably beautiful evening late in August, 1980, I asked a 17 - year - old friend of mine how the Common was getting on. Immediate pleasure spread across his agreeable countenance, as he replied: "*The Common? Oh, the Common's got that golden look*".



THE GREAT POND.

5 Plants

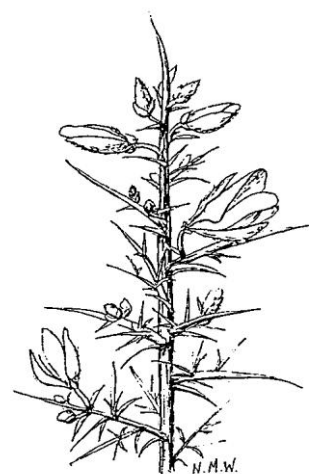


These following three chapters, on plants, insects, birds and animals, can give only a brief outline of the more notable species to be seen on the Common. Inside the back cover some useful books are recommended for further identification purposes.

Nearly 400 species of flowering plants and ferns have been recorded on Epsom Common. Many of these are plants which would normally be expected on a clay soil, but there are some which

are less common, such as a fine colony of Southern Marsh Orchids, the two umbelliferous species of Pepper Saxifrage and Callous Fruited Water Dropwort, as well as the Slender Rush which grows in some profusion along the wide grassy paths. The ponds provide many additions to the number of species, and each seems to have its own specialities. The Stew Pond has White Water Lilies, Bog Bean and Lesser Water Plantain; Baron's Pond has Greater Bladderwort and the uncommon cream-coloured variety of the Yellow Flag Iris; in the newly established Great Pond there are Greater Spearwort and stretches of Amphibious Bistort.

In spite of the mainly acid soil, which is indicated by areas of Bracken and Ling, there are, surprisingly, a few places where chalk-loving plants grow. This is particularly evident along the verges bordering Dorking Road and Wells Road, where wild Parsnip is abundant, and also in a few places near the Great Pond. The Common is beautiful at all seasons, and perhaps it will add to the pleasure of those using it if an indication is given of some of the plants which can be seen month by month. In January, the massive ancient Oak trees and graceful Silver Birches show to great advantage silhouetted against the sky, with a golden brown carpet of Bracken and leaves beneath. The Red Osiers which have been planted near the viewpoints shine out, and it is easy to distinguish the Ash trees by the bunches of keys or by the sooty black buds on the grey twigs. There are berries on the Holly and Hawthorn, and there may be a few Rose Hips left on Wild Roses. For those looking for a promise of spring, the young catkins can be seen on the Hazel bushes, and a few early flowers may appear on the Gorse.



GORSE

By February the Hazel catkins have lengthened into graceful tassels, and young catkins can also be seen on the Silver Birches. In places where the ground has been disturbed, the yellow flowers of Coltsfoot may appear. The very observant will be able to find the tiny pale green flowers in the centre of the leaf like branches of the Butcher's Broom.

March brings a silvery appearance to the Sallow and Goat Willow as the catkins begin to develop. Long woolly catkins hang down from Grey Poplar and Aspen trees. In the woodlands, the golden flowers of Lesser Celandine sparkle, and there are flowers on the Barren Strawberry and Lesser Periwinkle. Daisies, which are with us all the year round, are now increasing in number. The dark twigs of the Blackthorn appear to be sprinkled with snow at the end of the month as the dainty flowers blossom on the bare branches.

In April, fluffy pale yellow male catkins or silvery green female ones cover the Sallow trees. The Crack Willow is a delicate yellow green as the leaves and catkins come out together, and the Creeping Willow produces its silvery catkins. The Gorse bushes are now ablaze with golden flowers, and Wood Anemones spring up amongst the Bracken which provides them with the shade they require in summer. Along the woodland paths can be found Dog Violets, Wood Sorrel, Greater Stitchwort, Herb Robert and Red Campion.



Lady's Smock, Meadow Buttercup and Cow Parsley, which start to flower in April, continue into May, when daily more and more flowers come into bloom and the trees burst into leaf. Patches of Bluebells appear amongst the Bracken, and, in the woods, Bush Vetch with its dull purple flowers and Bitter Vetch with reddish purple flowers may also be found. The dainty yellow flowers of Tormentil appear at the edges of the footpaths, where they will continue to bloom all through the summer and autumn until November. Lords and Ladies, whose name is a reminder of the days when the starch from

the corms was used to stiffen the frills and ruffs of court dresses, is in bloom, the unusual flowers (see over) being enclosed in a pale green sheath. The Oak trees are producing their yellowish green catkins, and the Ash now shows the purple-coloured stamens of its flowers that burst from the bare twigs. The Wild Cherry is in flower, and towards the end of the month the Crab Apple and Hawthorn trees burst into bloom. The Sycamore, bearing its yellowish-green flowers in long hanging clusters, and its close relative, the Field Maple, with its green flowers held erect, show in the sunshine.



Three white woodland flowers - GREATER STITCHWORT (upper left); WOOD ANEMONE (lower left); and WOOD SORREL.

This is the time when the grasses start flowering, among the first being Sweet Vernal Grass, Cocksfoot and Meadow Foxtail (next page), and the Bracken begins to unfurl its fronds so that the brown ground-cover is converted to a fresh green.

In June the beautiful Wild Roses scent the air with their fragrant blooms, and the Brambles are covered with flowers. The graceful Rowan trees bear flat heads of white flowers, and the Elder bushes are covered in creamy white blossom. The Clovers will start to bloom this month. Red Clover is abundant and, in places, there are large patches of Zig - Zag Clover growing with the Southern Marsh Orchids. Alsike Clover, which may be a relic of cultivation, also occurs in several places. Common Birdsfoot Trefoil with its gay, yellow flowers, should be in bloom, and in the damper places the Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil can be found. Silverweed and Creeping Cinquefoil, with their similar yellow flowers, now adorn the grassy paths. Ox-eye Daisies and Yarrow are in flower, but Goat's Beard will be seen only by those who visit the Common in the morning, as its yellow flowers close by noon. Amongst the grasses which flower in June are the False Oat, Rough Meadow-grass, Wavy Hair-grass and Red Fescue. Two of the climbing plants which flower now are the White Bryony, with its light green ivy - shaped leaves and attractive greenish-white flowers, and the unrelated Black Bryony, with heart-shaped shiny leaves and small green flowers in long spikes. The Honeysuckle, which twines over shrubs and trees, produces its sweet-scented two-lipped flowers.

July is probably the best month for viewing the ponds, as the Yellow Flags then give a splendid display. White water lilies are now in flower, and Amphibious Bistort spreads its sheets of pink flowers over the water. Round the edges of the ponds there are to be found the Common and Tufted Water Forget - me - nots, Pink Water Speedwell and Brooklime. There will be Water Crowfoot floating on the water and, belonging to the same family, Celery - leaved Buttercups and Lesser Spearwort growing on the muddy edges. Reedmace, with its long sword-like leaves and chocolate brown spikes of flowers, threatens to choke the ponds, and so also does the Smooth Horsetail. July is the month of the Vetches, of which there are so many species. The Common Vetch has short-stalked purple flowers in ones or twos, while Tufted Vetch has showy blue-violet flowers in one-sided spikes. The Hairy Tare has tiny pale lilac flowers in a spike, while the small lilac flowers of the Smooth Tare are usually borne singly. There is the Meadow Vetchling with clusters of yellow flowers, but the most delightful of all is the Grass Vetchling (illustration p. 51) , whose crimson pea-flowers appear to be suspended like little jewels amongst the grasses. Common St. John's Wort is in flower, as also is the dainty Slender St. John's Wort. Towards the edges of grassy paths one may see Trailing St. John's Wort, which can easily be overlooked as it grows beside the Tormentil. The tall yellow spikes of Agrimony appear amongst the grasses, and the less common Fragrant Agrimony also occurs. Creeping Thistles are very common, and Marsh Thistles with both purple and white flowers grow in the damper places. The showy spikes of Rose-bay form large purplish - pink patches amongst the Bracken and grasses. The Tufted Hair-grass, which is very abundant, produces its tall decorative flowerheads, and other grasses which flower in July are Brown Bent, Marsh Foxtail, Timothy and Small Catstail.



Trap of hairs that
allow insects entrance
but no exit until hairs
dry after pollination.

Male flowers.

Female flowers.

LORDS AND LADIES
or CUCKOO PINT.

In August there are still more flowers that come into bloom. Sneezewort, Gipsywort and Common Fleabane grow in damp places, and Ling appears amongst the Bracken on the higher parts of the Common. There are Harebells, Sawwort, Common Centaury and Devil's Bit Scabious, too. The dainty Stone Parsley grows next to the Hedge Parsley, which has been in flower since June. The golden heads of Hoary Ragwort shine out, and the handsome flowers of the Great Willowherb add beauty to the marshy parts of the Common. Red Bartsia is very common now on the grassy paths. In the Stew Pond, it may be possible at this time of year to see the minute, white flowers of the Canadian Waterweed, which appear to be attached to the submerged plant by pink threads, and Baron's Pond will be beautified by the bright yellow flowers of the Greater Bladderwort. The last of the grasses to flower is the Purple Moor-grass, whose purple stamens show how it obtained its descriptive name.

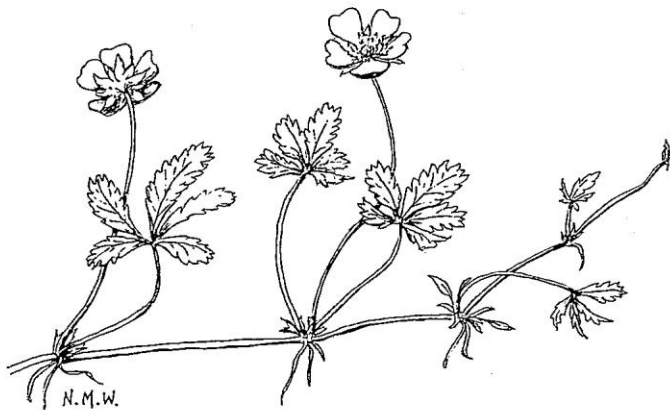


Four distinctive and common grasses, from left to right -

MEADOW FOXTAIL
PERENNIAL RYE GRASS
FALSE OAT GRASS
WALL BARLEY



FIELD ROSE OR TRAILING ROSE -
THE MUSK ROSE OF SHAKESPEARE.



CREEPING CINQUEFOIL.

September is the month of the harvest when there is an abundance of luscious Blackberries, and it seems that the birds will have a plentiful supply of food for the winter, with the purple Sloes on the Blackthorn, the Rose Hips, the Haws and the berries on the Honeysuckle, Woody Nightshade and Elder. The seed pods of the Rosebay are uncurling, shedding their hairy seeds which float away. On a warm day the air may seem to be full of fluff as the Rosebay is joined by Thistledown and parachutes from Dandelion and Goat's Beard. The Bur - Marigolds come into bloom near the ponds, patches of garden escapes such as Michaelmas Daisies and Golden Rod become noticeable, and flowers may be seen on the Small Gorse.



TORMENTIL (above)
and SILVERWEED (left),
along with CINQUEFOIL
(overleaf) are all
Potentilla species.



October is the golden month when Bracken and grasses change colour. Leaves on the Brambles take on a beautiful red tinge, and the fruits of the Docks are a rich reddish-brown. Most of the Sallows turn a golden yellow sparkling against the dark green of other trees. Under the Oak trees acorns litter the ground, and it will be easy to distinguish the Turkey Oak by its prickly acorn cups. White, brown, yellow and scarlet toadstools appear overnight. Ivy, which is probably the last plant to come into bloom, bears its small green flowers in erect clusters.

By November the Oaks have turned a reddish-brown, and the Ash trees shed their leaves. Crab Apples, which are said to be a favourite food for Roe Deer, litter the ground beneath the trees in a good year. The dark green Holly, with its glossy leaves and red berries, stands out against the other trees. The ground gradually becomes covered with a carpet of gold and brown leaves beneath the trees, Bracken turns a lovely golden brown, and the grass is bleached to a light fawn colour, except where mowing has taken place, or the grass has been trampled on the footpaths.



CRAB-APPLE BLOSSOM.



ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB - flower head and later capsules dispersing their fine airborne seeds.

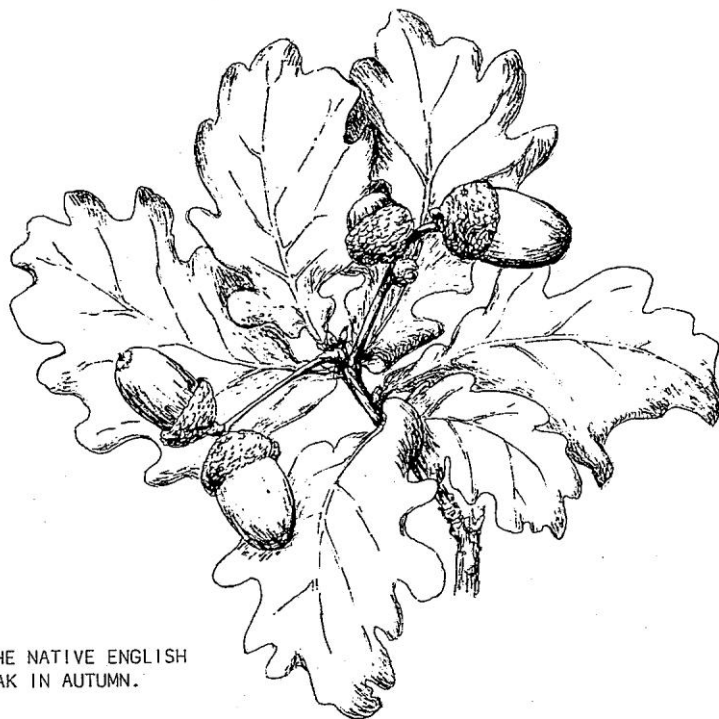
December brings us round in a full circle to the landscape we started with in January, for it is during this month that the deciduous trees will have lost their final leaves and once again show their bare branches to great advantage.



CRAB-APPLE FRUIT.



SHAGGY INK-CAP MUSHROOM - seen in late summer and autumn, this being the main season for many mushrooms and toadstools.



THE NATIVE ENGLISH
OAK IN AUTUMN.

Thus, at all times of the year, there is something on our Common to delight the lover of trees, plants and flowers. If, however, you know where rare blooms grow, please enjoy them secretly, or they might disappear as some have already done. In his 'History of Epsom', published in 1825, Henry Pownall includes a comprehensive list of wild plants and flowers to be found in the area, with their Latin and English names and some guidance as to where to look for them. A large number of Pownall's species are now extinct or extremely rare, which is rather saddening.

A list of plants which have so far been identified on the Common is available from the Secretary of

the Association for a small charge. Both the popular and the Latin names are provided.

6 Butterflies, Dragonflies and Other Insects

There are more different species of insects in the world than any other group of animals or plants, and some 20,000 occur in this country. Most of them are small and inconspicuous, and even experts often find them difficult to identify. Nevertheless, there are a few hundred which attract attention because of their large size or bright colours; some are so well-known that they have been given common names, but most have only Latin names, or their common name covers many different, though perhaps similar, species. Although some, like the butterflies of our gardens, will be familiar to most of us, a book with good, coloured illustrations is essential to recognize most of even the larger insects. One of the most generally useful, which also has a text giving some idea of the vast range and variety of insects and lists the main divisions (or more correctly, Orders), with helpful keys for identification, is noted inside the rear cover.

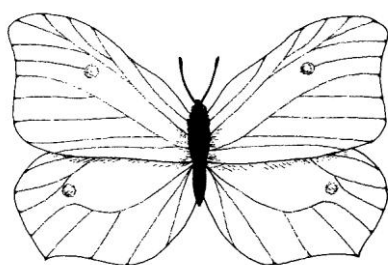


All adult insects have three pairs of legs, and most have wings; their body is divided into three sections: head, with a pair of antennae or feelers; thorax, to which the legs and wings are attached; and abdomen. They differ from spiders, which have four pairs of legs, no wings, and, as the head and thorax are combined, the body has only two sections. The appearance, habits and life-histories of insects are very diverse, and the larva or immature stage often differs in appearance and feeding habit from the adult. Thus caterpillars have strong jaws enabling them to chew leaves, roots and even wood, whereas butterflies and moths possess only a long 'tongue' through which they sip nectar. Although many insects feed on plants, others are carnivorous, feeding on all sorts of small organisms, including other insects; yet others eat decaying matter like rotting vegetation and dead animals. Some insects, such as water-beetles, spend all their life in fresh water, while others, like dragonflies and midges, live in water as larvae but spend their adult life on the wing.

In some of the most successful and numerous Orders of insects including the beetles, butterflies and moths, and flies, the larva is quite different from the adult and turns into a pupa (sometimes called a chrysalis), from which the adult emerges. In other Orders, including the grasshoppers and true bugs, the immature stage, called a nymph, is very similar to the adult except that it lacks wings at first, but these gradually develop until they are fully formed when the insect is mature.

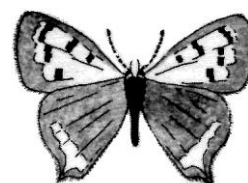
As few insect Orders have been surveyed on the Common, and space in this book is limited, most of it will be devoted to two small but attractive groups, the butterflies and the dragonflies, with a brief mention of a few others.

There are only about 60 species of British butterflies, of which fewer than half have been found on the Common in recent years; the main food plant of the caterpillar is given in



brackets after the name of each species mentioned. All the common butterflies of our gardens are to be seen, the Large or Cabbage White, the Small White and the Green-veined White (Cabbage family - Crucifers) ; one of the more striking sights, especially on sunny days in late winter and early spring, is the aptly named Brimstone (Buckthorn) . It is worthwhile waiting for this to settle, as, when the wings are folded, it looks just like a leaf. The Orange Tip (Lady's Smock, Charlock and other crucifers) completes the list of the 'Whites', though it does not seem so common as it used to be.

The more colourful group, including the Peacock (Nettle), Red Admiral (Nettle), Small Tortoise-shell (Nettle), Painted Lady (Thistle and others) though most of the ones we see are immigrants from the Continent, and Comma (Nettle, Hop) are usually plentiful, and the Comma seems more abundant than it used to be. A less common species is the White Admiral (Honeysuckle), though a few can usually be seen on Bramble flowers on sunny days during July and August. The Purple Emperor (Sallow) rarer still, has also been noted during the last few years. Fritillaries seem much more local than formerly, and the only one which has been seen here recently is the Small Pearl - Bordered (Dog Violet). The most numerous butterflies on the Common are the 'Browns', the caterpillars of which feed on various grasses.



SMALL COPPER

They include the Meadow Brown, the Gatekeeper, the Wall and the Small Heath, but the one most frequently seen is the Speckled Wood. It is one of the few butterflies that enjoys the shade and can easily be recognised by its dark brown background, dappled with a pattern of pale yellow spots.



BURNET MOTH

Most of the remaining species are rather smaller. The Small Copper (Dock, Sorrel) has brilliant coppery-red forewings with a dark brown edge and dark spots and cannot be mistaken for anything else.

Although there are many blue butterflies in the country, the Common Blue (Birdsfoot Trefoil, Rest Harrow) is the only one usually seen here.

The Purple Hairstreak (Oak), and the Green Hairstreak also occur. There are four Skippers, with a characteristic way of flitting from flower to

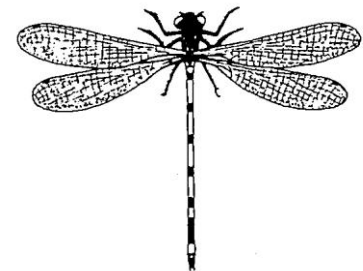
flower; the Large, Small and Essex Skippers, (various grass species), and the Dingy Skipper (Birdsfoot Trefoil) are all common. The first three have a tawny forewing with a darker edge, rather broader in the Large Skipper, with duller hindwings. The Dingy Skipper is a dull brown, looking rather like a moth.

Butterflies are one family of the Order Lepidoptera, the remaining 2000 or so species found in this country, including many families collectively called moths, being mainly night-fliers. A few normally fly by day, and of these the Burnets (Trefoils etc.) are very common in late summer. They are black-bodied, with five or six conspicuous red spots on a black forewing and a red hind wing; the Cinnabar has a similar appearance, with a red line parallel with the leading edge of the forewing, though it is quite unrelated. Its caterpillars feed on, and often strip, Ragwort, and are easily recognised by their yellow and black bands.

Dragonflies are carnivorous throughout their life, though quite harmless to humans, and are of special interest in view of the restoration of the Great Pond. There are only about 40 British species, and 13 have been recorded on the Common so far, and others will undoubtedly be found in the next year or so. Only species which breed in still water are likely to occur, as many species require running water, or are localized in other parts of the country. Dragonflies fall into two main groups, quite easy to distinguish, the delicate Damselflies and the larger and more robust Hawkers and Darters - true dragonflies.

The Damselflies are numerous and easy to observe on herbage in and around all the ponds. They usually make fairly short flights before alighting, and a pair, male and female, are often seen flying together, and it will be noticed that the sexes are often differently coloured. When they first emerge they are similar, both often being a pale green, and they flit around in a characteristic way quite differently from their flight when they are mature, and have assumed their full colours. The basic body colour of the males may be red, green or blue, with varying amounts of black in patterns characteristic of the species. They are about 1 - 1½ " long, and the wingspan is usually under 2". The following species have been noted -

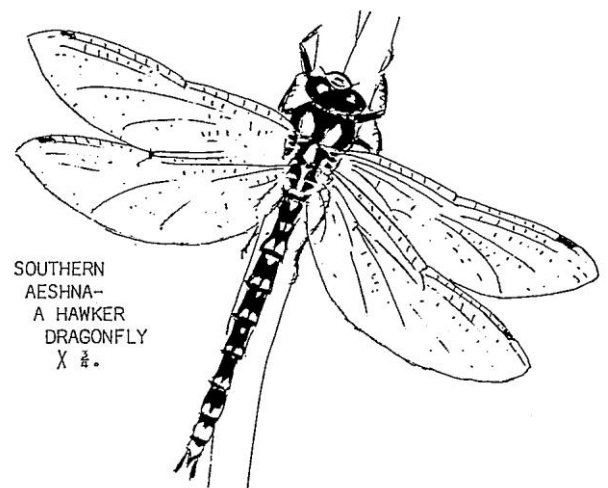
Large Red Damselfly - both sexes red.
 Red-eyed Damselfly - mainly dark, but with prominent red eyes
 Common Coenagrion - male mainly blue, female greenish
 Blue-tailed Damselfly - both sexes dark, male with blue segment near tail
 Emerald Damselfly - both sexes bronze green
 Common Damselfly - male blue, female green.



COMMON COENAGRION DAMSELFLY

The larger dragonflies can often be seen hawking for insects across or around the ponds, usually working up and down a regular beat and darting off at intervals to attack their prey. They come to rest less frequently than damselflies, but when they do they may remain for several minutes if undisturbed, and this affords a good opportunity to observe their characteristic features. The large hawkers are about three inches long with a wing span of about four inches, and they have slender bodies -

Brown Aeshna - the only large species with yellow - brown wings easily noted in flight.
 Southern Aeshna - probably the most frequently seen in this group. There are prominent green spots on the thorax; abdomen dark - brown with green and yellow markings, though the last few segments in the male are mainly blue.
 Emperor Dragonfly - thorax mainly blue-green; male with a blue, female with a green abdomen, both with a dark central line.



SOUTHERN
 AESHNA-
 A HAWKER
 DRAGONFLY
 X ½.

One or two other species may occur but have not yet been recorded.

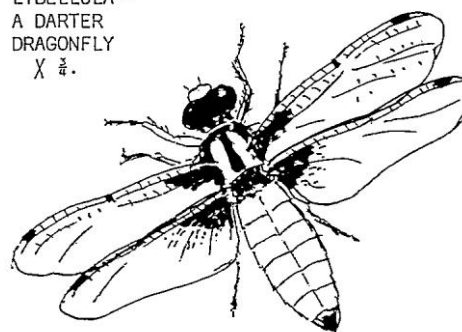
The remaining group of darters are shorter - about two inches long with a wing span of about three inches - and are more heavily built, with a much broader and flatter abdomen -

Black-lined Orthetrum - abdomen of male powder blue with a black tip, female and immature male yellow-brown.
 Broad-bodied Libellula - similar to above but male without black tip; base of wings brown.

Four-spotted Libellula - male and female with yellow-brown abdomen, but base of wings and patch near tip brown - hence the name.

Common Darter - appears later in the season and may be seen into October. Males with red abdomen, female and immature males yellow-brown.

BROAD-BODIED
LIBELLULA -
A DARTER
DRAGONFLY
X 4.

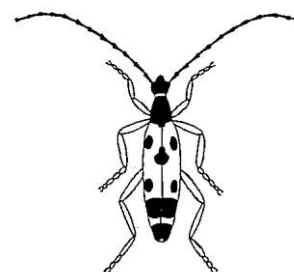


The help of Roger Hawkins in listing the dragonflies is gratefully acknowledged.

3

Only brief mention can be made of other insects, and one of the most likely places to see these is on flowers, especially those of Hedge and Cow Parsley, from May onwards, when most insects are becoming active. On such flowers may be seen many brightly-coloured beetles; there will be rusty - red soldier beetles, some with a black tip to the wing-cases, and the dull blue sailor beetles.

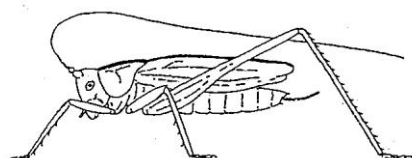
There is a related species with metallic bluish - green wing - cases with a red tip, but this has no common name. All these are about h" long and fly readily. Some of the longhorn beetles, so-called from their antennae which are much longer than their body, are also to be found on flowers. A very striking yellow and black one (known only by its Latin name (*Leptura maculata*) is about an inch long, narrowing towards the tail.



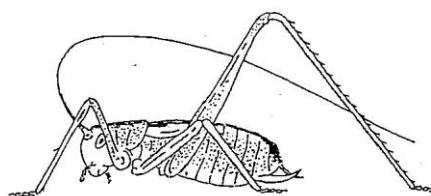
LEPTURA MACULATA -
LONGHORN BEETLE

There will be several sorts of hover flies, many with cream and black or yellow and black bands across the abdomen. These are the flies which hover in one place for several seconds before darting off to another spot or settling on a flower to feed. Some of their larvae live in mud or stagnant water - the rat-tailed maggots - others feed voraciously on greenfly and other pests. Like all true flies, which range from mosquitoes, gnats and midges to bluebottles, houseflies and many others similar in appearance, they have only one pair of wings. Members of the Order to which ants, bees and wasps belong all have two pairs of wings, though, in ants, only the queens and males are winged, and that only for the short period of the mating flight, which occurs on hot humid days in late summer. To the same Order belong many different families of insects which are parasitic on others. The females have a long 'tail' equivalent to the sting of a wasp, through which they can deposit one or more eggs into or on the young stages of other insects. When the grubs hatch from the eggs, they feed inside or outside the host until it is dead, by which time the parasite is fully fed. They are one of the important natural controls of many insects, including pests such as the caterpillar of the Cabbage White. The adult parasites, usually black or brown in colour, are mostly minute, but range up to an inch or longer and are often seen on flowers. One family includes the tiny Gall Wasps which cause many of the familiar galls on Oak trees and some other plants. They stimulate the plant tissues to produce a characteristic gall in which the grub feeds and develops; they are responsible for the Marble Galls on Oak, for Oak-apples and the reddish Spangle Galls so common on the underside of Oak leaves, about 1/8 - 1/4 in diameter and attached to the leaf by a small central stem. The Acorn-cup Gall which distorts the acorn into an irregular mass is seriously affecting most of our oaks. Other insects and mites as well as fungi can cause galls of various types, and specialist books must be consulted to recognise them.

Grasshoppers can be seen and heard throughout the latter part of the summer; each species, as with birds, has its characteristic song. Bush Crickets are rather similar, but have long slender antennae, and the females have a fearsome looking curved 'tail' through which they insert their eggs into the food plant. The Oak Bush Cricket and the Speckled Bush Cricket are both bright green, though close inspection reveals the minute reddish speckles on the latter. They often fly towards the light and into open windows at night.



OAK BUSH CRICKET X 2



SPECKLED BUSH CRICKET X 2

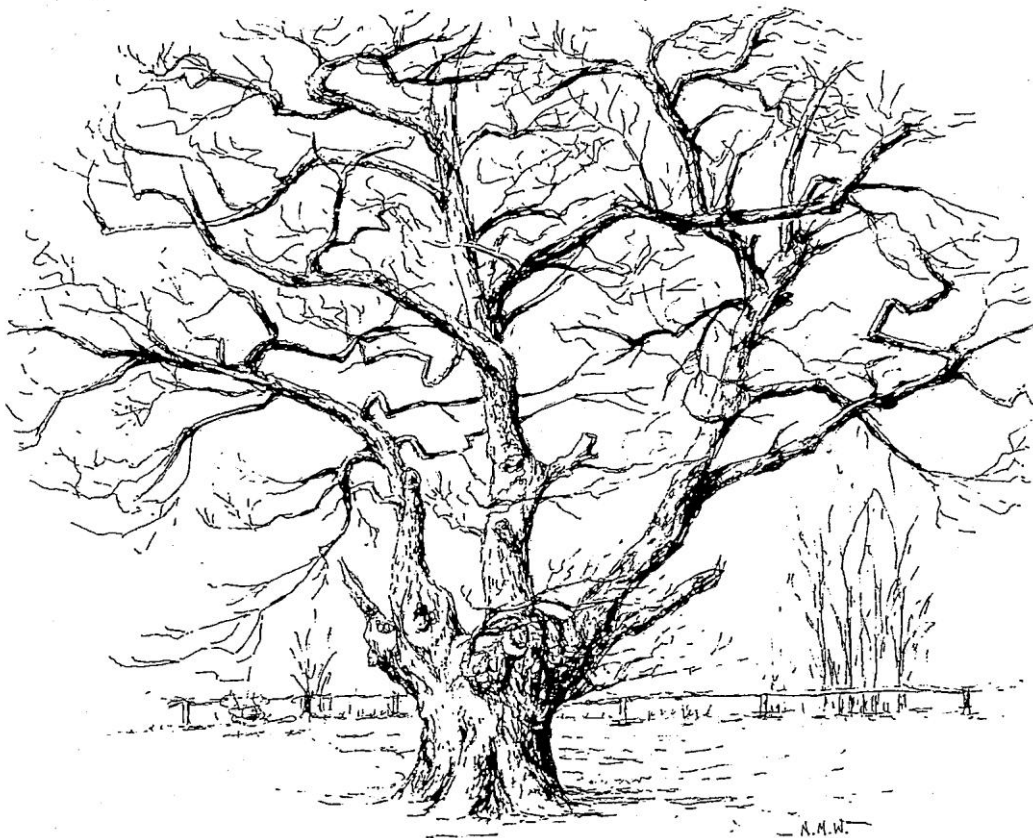
The various types of true bugs, with mouthparts adapted for sucking, will also be found on flowers; most are slender, active, about 1/2" long and green or brown, though some have an attractive pattern. They are related to greenfly and blackfly, so familiar to gardeners, and collectively known as aphids; there are several hundred species of these in Britain, and most plants are attacked by one or more species. In summer the unfertilized females produce living young and increase at a phenomenal rate, attracting numbers of predators, including ladybirds and their larvae, other types of bugs, the larvae of Hover Flies and Lacewings, as well as the minute parasites already mentioned.

Thus each plant has a little world of its own, with the insects and other organisms depending on the species of the plant, and this, in turn, on the type of soil and the amount of moisture.

The Stew Pond has the usual range of water insects. There are several beetles, including the Great Water Beetle, about 1½" long, which can be seen coming up to the surface to renew the bubble of air for breathing which is trapped at its hind end. Of the water bugs, the Pond Skaters are always to be found skimming the surface film on their long legs. The Water Boatman, about 3/4in long, is also a familiar sight as it 'rows' on its back with its long pair of hind legs looking uncannily like oars. There are several types of Caddis Fly, the larvae of which spin together a small case of tiny stones or other fragments in which they live on the bottom, where they remain until they emerge as adults. These are rather like moths, usually dull-brown, but the wings have no scales and are folded over the back, like a roof, when the insects are at rest. Mayflies and many other insects also occur, though probably the most abundant are the larvae of the numerous species of midges and related flies which swarm around the pond throughout the summer and often during the winter.

Some insects have already started to breed in the Great Pond, and one of the most interesting aspects of its establishment is the rate at which insects and other groups will colonize it.

Finally, it must be admitted that we still know little about the different sorts of insects on the Common and we hope gradually to build up a more complete list. If you can help in this by recording groups of which you have any specialist knowledge, please get in touch with the Secretary of the Association.

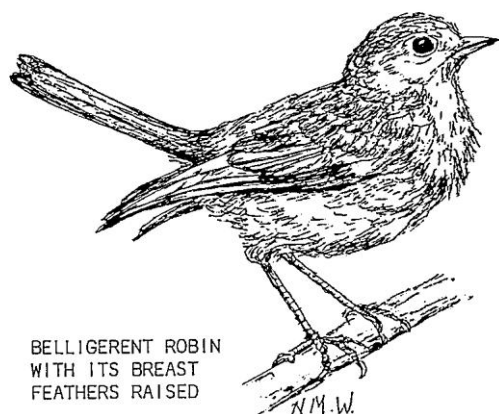


ANCIENT OAK IN THE STEW POND CAR PARK.

Such a tree is the best possible example of a single plant which is a community in itself, it being host to innumerable different species of insects, fungi, birds and animals, algae, lichens, plants and micro-organisms.

7 Birds and other Vertebrates

When the Epsom Common Association was formed a few years ago much discussion took place upon the choice of an emblem that could be placed on our membership cards. Something was needed that would capture the great joy that this marvellous Common gives to so many people. The choice which immediately came to mind was the singing, hovering, Skylark.



BELLIGERENT ROBIN
WITH ITS BREAST
FEATHERS RAISED

Indeed, the birds of Epsom Common are one of its greatest attractions, for over one hundred species can be seen and listened to. This was one of the reasons that prompted the Nature Conservancy Council to declare it a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The Common has, within its bounds, a wide variety of habitats that attract birds that breed here as well as others that winter here, not to mention those passing migrants that stop to feed during the spring and autumn migrations.

There are abundant areas of woodland, both open, with scattered trees and closed zones where the top branches merge, mostly deciduous, but with a fair sprinkling of conifers. Much scrub abounds, some dense and some thin, composed of thorn, gorse, bramble and wild rose. One of the valuable features is the large amount and wide variety of tall grasses and a good area of short mown grass as well. We also have water, at Stamford Green and the Stew Pond. Now with the restoration of the Great Pond, the water areas have been more than quadrupled in extent and variety. There exist also some small ponds which fill in the rainy season, and these have considerable value.

All these separate, varied habitats are havens for a multitude of insects and small mammals, seeds and fruits, without which the birds could not exist.

Protection of bird life depends almost entirely on the preservation of these habitats with their varied vegetation along with the stretches of water. Periodically we have fires, many regrettably started deliberately or by careless acts, and these destroy the plants, together with the insect and animal life, leaving barren patches devoid of birds, and looking much like a charred battlefield. This menace, together with the dumping of litter and other rubbish and the encroachment by the motor-car and motor-cycle, are the main danger to bird life today.

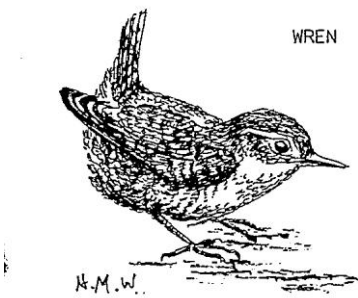
What of the birds themselves? These fall into three groups, the first of which are the breeding birds. At the beginning, mention was made of the Skylark whose sustained warbling, as it rises in the sky and slowly sinks back again, will last for 10-12 minutes in every hour of daylight, and is a delight to the eye and ear. The open, tufted grass areas provide its nesting place.

From the bushes all round the Common comes the strident song of the Robin which lustily defends its feeding territory against all intruders, the individual territories being very evenly spaced. The Robin is one of the few birds that sing all the year round, except for the month-long



SKYLARK

moult in the July / August period. During the winter the female also sings and establishes an independent feeding territory.



WREN

From the bushes also comes the liquid melody of the Blackbird's song, to some the most attractive of all. It is one of our most abundant birds. From similar bushes, but in smaller numbers, we hear the Song Thrush, which repeats every distinct musical phrase three times over. Still less frequently, very early in the year, we hear the piercing song of the Mistle Thrush which we see perched high on a bare tree, although its favourite food, the mistletoe berry, is not to be found in the area.

The Wren, Jenny Wren to many, is one of our smallest birds and, at Epsom, one of the most abundant. Its piercing, trilling song, so loud for such a small bird, is heard all over the Common. The male is polygamous, building sometimes as many as six nests low in the scrub and taking a succession of mates to breed.

The Nightingale, perhaps our champion songster, is regrettably declining in numbers, both here and elsewhere. It has bred for many years locally but is now very scarce.

The Stonechat, a bird much associated with the County of Surrey and, indeed, the emblem of the Surrey Bird Club, is still with us but in reduced numbers. It can be seen perched on the top of a low bush, chatting continuously.

Another interesting but scarce visitor is the Spotted Flycatcher, which arrives late on in the summer, usually in early July, when it will often take over a used and vacated nest of another bird.

Towards the end of April, the Cuckoo comes to find a home and foster parents for its egg, usually Dunnocks (Hedge Sparrow). The Dunnock is a quiet and unobtrusive bird, nesting on the Common in good quantity, feeding often in nearby gardens.

The Meadow Pipit, another possible foster parent for the Cuckoo, breeds in numbers that are very variable indeed, and the same applies to the Tree Pipit.

Five species of Tits are always with us: Great Tit; Coal Tit; Blue Tit; Marsh Tit; and Long-Tailed Tit. It could be said that they have the highest standard of I.Q. of any of our local birds, particularly the Blue Tits. Their mental ability in tackling problems, such as piercing a milk bottle top or hanging upside down to obtain food from the bird table, is delightful to watch. The Common and the gardens adjoining it provide nesting sites in plenty. Their chief enemies are the marauding domestic cats and the egg-thieving Magpies and Jays. Their normal diet is an insect one, and during the breeding season they consume enormous quantities of caterpillars.

The Finch family is well represented, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet and Lesser Redpoll all breeding here in varying numbers. There can be few more



GREEN
WOODPECKER

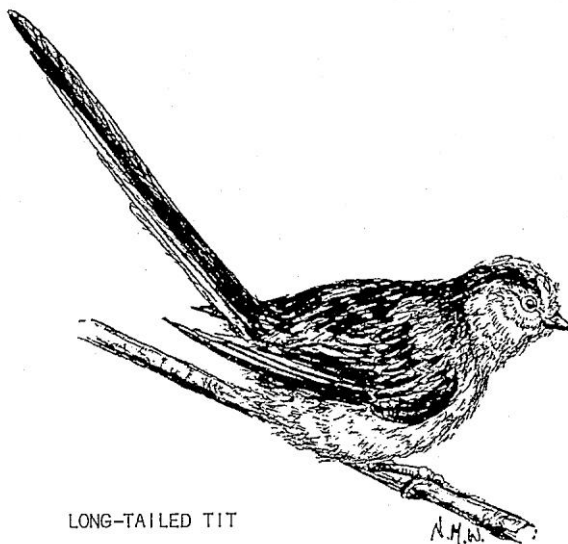
attractive examples of the nest-building art that the Chaffinch's nest of moss and lichens. It has tended to be less common in recent years with some movement towards agricultural land. The Bullfinch's liking for buds on fruit trees makes it somewhat unwelcome in many gardens, but it is a very beautiful and somewhat shy bird.

The Redpolls make their home in the conifers, and the number of these birds is increasing. All the finches tend to form large flocks in early autumn, sometimes the sexes separately. They feed on the plentiful supply of seeds to be found on the many species of grasses and other plants such as thistle. The Redpolls are sometimes joined on their seed-eating forays by Siskins which do not breed here. Mixed flocks of most of the finches can at times be seen.



TAWNY OWL (above), and
BARN OWL, holding a mouse.

Quite early in April the migrant warblers begin to arrive, and suddenly the Common is full of their song. The most abundant is the Willow Warbler, whose gentle song of a series of descending notes sounds to our ears more like an enticement than a defence warning to others. It is preceded by a margin of some weeks by the Chiffchaff which, in appearance, is almost identical to the Willow Warbler but has a totally different song, a rather metallic 'Chiff Chaff', as its name implies. It delivers it from a song-post high up in the trees. Also in April the Garden Warbler arrives from its winter quarters in Africa, where most of the Warblers spend this season. It is more secretive than some of the others and is seldom seen, but its distinctive song can be heard in the hawthorn. It is a mellow warble, but low pitched and almost guttural; it is smaller in numbers than the previous two.

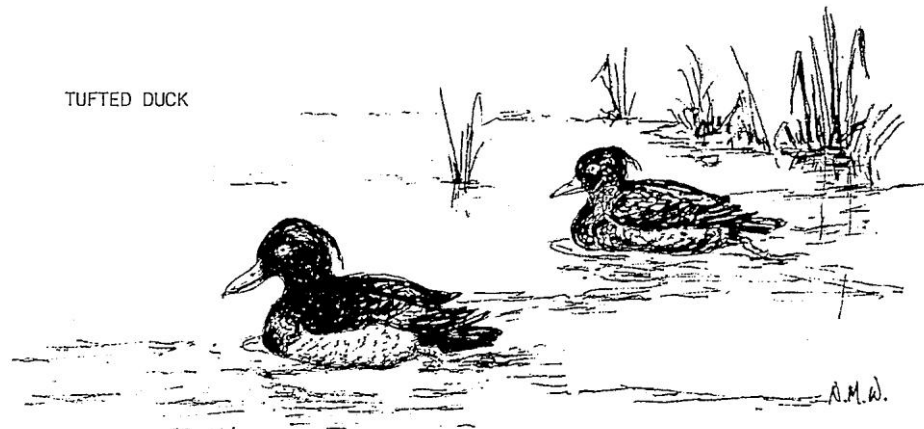


LONG-TAILED TIT

In the open areas, with low scrub cover, is heard the reeling sound of another rather shy bird, the Grasshopper Warbler. Few in number, they have a song like an angler's reel being wound in. On the edge of the woodland the Black Cap can be found, a bird of distinctive appearance, as its name implies, again not large in number, but easy to identify both by its appearance and its powerful melodious song, which always seems to come to an abrupt end.

During the winter of 1968/69 some overwhelming calamity struck the Whitethroat in its African quarters, and, instead of being the most common of our migrant warblers, it was hardly seen in the summer of 1969 arriving at its nesting grounds here. Numbers have built up to some extent since then, but they are still rather scarce. The Lesser Whitethroat, once much fewer, is now the larger of the two in numbers.

With the restoration of the Great Pond, Sedge Warblers and Grey Wagtails have put in an appearance for the first time.



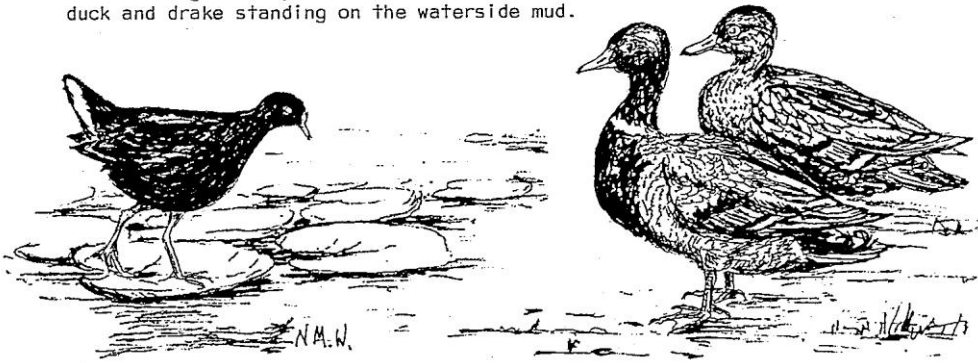
In the wooded areas we have all species of Woodpeckers known in this country. Even the very rare Wryneck, or Brown Woodpecker, has been seen, but breeding has not been proved. All through the summer, the distinctive 'yaffle' of the Green Woodpecker can be heard and also the drumming of the Greater Spotted. The Lesser Spotted, in small numbers, is nearly always present. The existence of many dead trees, which provide a home for the insect life on which the Woodpeckers feed, is of the utmost importance, and we are glad these are not removed.

We have a reasonable quota of Owls -Barn, Tawny and Little. The deep grass areas provide the habitat for small mammals, consisting mainly of mice, voles and shrews, on which the owls depend for most of their food. The Tawny Owl is the most numerous, but they all breed on or near the Common.

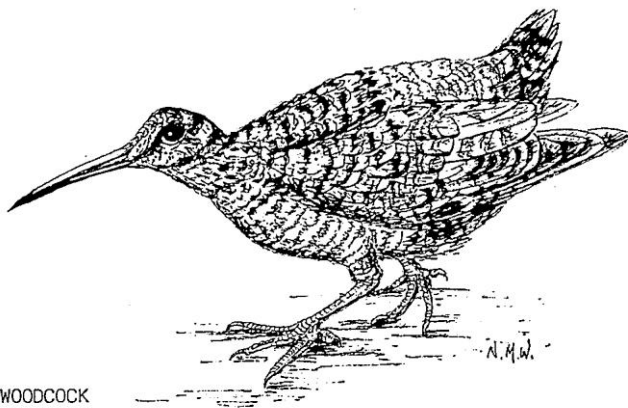
The Kestrel is our main bird of prey (once again the nature of the vegetation provides an ample food source) and it is seen hovering almost every day. Breeding on the Common is also confirmed. The Sparrow Hawk also finds plenty of food available and makes regular visits, but probably breeds just a little distance away. On very rare occasions Buzzards have been noted soaring and circling on the thermals thrust up by the Ridge, but once again, breeding probably takes place elsewhere.

As everyone must clearly see, three members of the Crow Family are always with us, and they are regarded by many as a very mixed blessing. The Carrion Crow, noisy and large in size but relatively small in numbers, is joined by a large body of chattering Magpies and screeching Jays. All members of this family of birds are persistent egg-thieves and their predation of other smaller birds causes some anxiety. In particular the Magpie is guilty, and its numbers are greatly on the increase. Furthermore, it is tending to concentrate on the fringe of urban areas where food is more plentiful. The problem of control is a difficult one and probably insoluble.

MOORHEN walking on lily leaves, with MALLARD duck and drake standing on the waterside mud.



Another rather mixed blessing is the Wood Pigeon, and those who have allotments near us are only too well aware of its destructive habits. The Collared Dove has similar ways but its numbers are small and the damage it causes light. Stock Doves and Turtle Doves are occasionally seen.



WOODCOCK

In the skies above us during high summer, that group of birds known as Hirundines (Swallows, House Martins and Swifts) wheel around in acrobatic display feeding on air-borne insect life. Their nest sites, which they share with a large mob of Starlings and House Sparrows, are the houses that fringe the Common.

We have two representatives of the Bunting family - the Yellow Hammer and the Reed Bunting. The former,

with its song that seems to say 'a little bit of bread and no cheese', is becoming more numerous and its beautiful yellow colouring is very conspicuous. The Reed Bunting has not much of a song but, perched on top of a low bush, gives a persistent reminder of its presence.

Among our woodlands we have a few Nuthatches and still fewer Tree Creepers, which suffered badly in the cold winter of 1978/79.

Of game birds we can boast two, both in limited numbers; out in the tall grass hide a very few Pheasants and, in the part appropriately called Woodcock Corner, we have the Woodcock itself (not really a game bird, but a woodland wader). It is a wary bird, with an astonishing range of vision, and it is seen usually when flying at dusk.

Among our areas of water, the recently restored Great Pond has yet to mature, a process that may take as much as four years, during which time the food chain within its waters and flooded edges will gradually develop. At the time of writing over a year has gone, and reports from the biologist who is making a special study of it indicate it is well on schedule and maturing at a rapid rate. We look forward, therefore, to an ever-increasing number of birds breeding, wintering and pausing on migration to feed there.

Taking all our water together we have Mallards, Coots, and Moorhens in plenty. Little Grebes



(Dabchick) are increasing and Tufted Ducks and Mandarin Ducks are now breeding. The Snipe is another newcomer to the flooded edges, and Teal have recently appeared, but it is not known where they are breeding-possibly far from our new stretch of water. At least one Grey Heron favours us with his presence and, no doubt, more from the same heronry will come eventually. Kingfishers have been seen, but possibly when moving from one stream to another. The Pied Wagtail breeds near our water and, like the finches, gathers into large flocks in the autumn, sometimes several hundred strong.

We have already had Canada Geese breeding on the island, and Swans and Pochards are also present, they both may breed in future. One very brief visit from a Hoopoe, a

Nightjar during the summer and, just recently, a Cetti's Warbler, not breeding, completes our tally of summer birds.

The winter bird population at Epsom is considerable; apart from the summer migrants the other breeding species stay with us in the winter and, in some cases, they are augmented by others of the same species coming in from Scandinavia and the Low Countries. Other species arrive from the same areas, but are ones that do not breed in the United Kingdom. Some, such as Gulls, spend all the year here except for a comparatively short absence during breeding nearer the coast.

Taking the Gulls first, we have a large gathering of Black-Headed, which are here for all the year except the April to July breeding season. They gather mostly on the mown grass areas to feed, roosting on nearby water and are seen mainly on The Cricketers part of the Common. In recent years there has been one solitary Mediterranean Gull among them which has obviously lost his sense of direction. At times they are joined by small numbers of Lesser Black-Backed, Common Gulls and even Herring Gulls with, very infrequently, Great Black-Backed.

Among the Thrush family, the Redwing and the Fieldfare arrive from Scandinavia fairly early in the winter in considerable numbers. They feed scattered around in different places, including agricultural land, but mass together in numbers of 1,000 or even 1,500 to roost in trees. For many years there has been a big roost near the Great Pond.

The Blackbird population is augmented by an influx from the Low Countries, but some of our breeding birds migrate further south.

Our smallest bird, the Goldcrest, is in these parts mainly, if not entirely, a winter visitor. It does breed all over the United Kingdom but in tall conifers (which are few on the Common), transferring in winter to broad-leaf woodland. Its numbers are also increased by a winter influx from farther north. The much rarer Firecrest has also been identified. A Goldeneye was recently seen at the Pond.

Another somewhat infrequent visitor from northern Europe is the Great Grey Shrike, but it seldom stays in one place for very long. A few Rooks from nearby rookeries come to feed on open grass areas but are not seen in summer. There has been at least one sighting of a Hen Harrier, but this is a very rare event, as is a wintering Brambling.

In considering the third group, passage migrants, one can be almost certain that our list is not complete, as many of the migrants stay here for so short a time, sometimes a matter of only an hour or so. Thus they can easily escape notice and identification.

Among Waders, it is probable that in the future more will stop at the Great Pond than we have had to date. Common Sandpipers, Ruffs, Curlew Sandpipers and Dunlin, have been definitely seen, while Lapwings come on local movements, a species which once bred here.

On the open parts, Ring Ouzel, Whinchat, Redstart and Wheatear are known callers, mostly on the autumn migration. There must be many others.

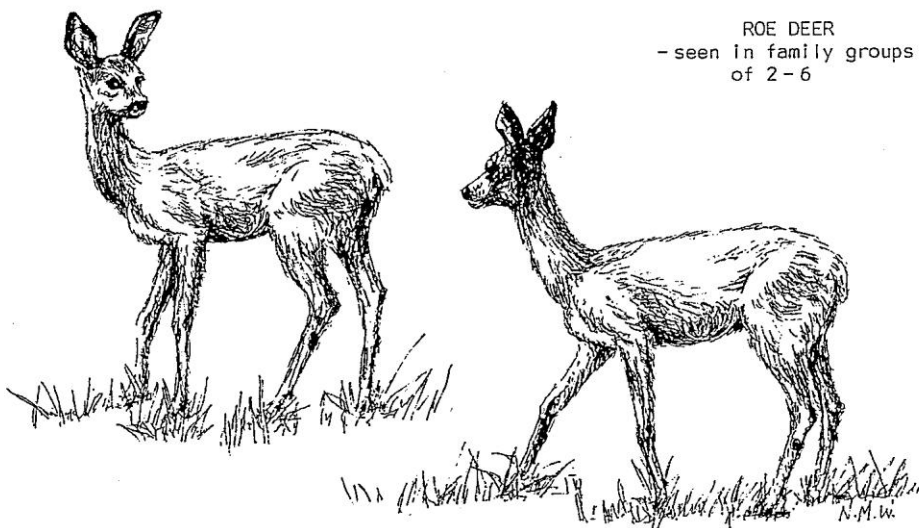
It seems appropriate that we should add to our survey of birdlife an account of our animals. The number of species is small compared with the birds, but some are present in quite large numbers and are important.

Our largest mammal is the Roe Deer, originally widespread but it became extinct in the late 18th century and was later introduced again into the big estates and royal parks. From these our present deer are descended. Due to their shy habits hiding among gorse and bracken, they are not often seen, but their footprints in the wet clay soil can be observed in all parts of the Common. Usually they keep in small family groups, but sometimes a solitary young buck is seen.



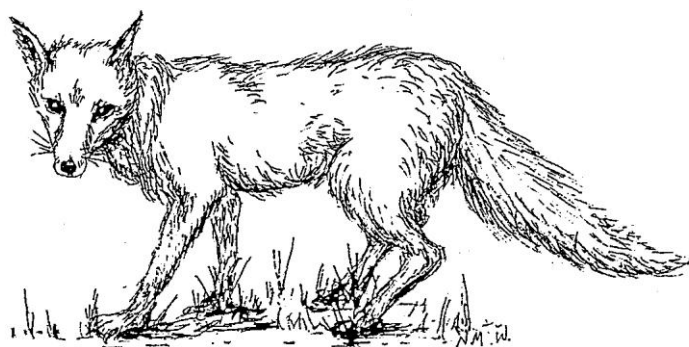
YOUNG
ROE DEER

The Fox is with us in quite large numbers and has become very urbanised, entering gardens to feed on scraps and to pillage dustbins and in many cases to attack, kill and eat the domestic cat. Its natural food, rabbits and large birds, are more difficult to obtain. The Fox, although regarded affectionately by many, is an undoubted carrier of disease.



ROE DEER
- seen in family groups
of 2-6

Badgers are close at hand, preferring the chalk of the Downs to our London Clay, of which the whole of the Common is composed. However, it is very likely they do venture on to the Woodcote area which is nearest to the chalk. They are nocturnal animals and, therefore, not always observed. Badger runs do exist in gardens in Woodcote.



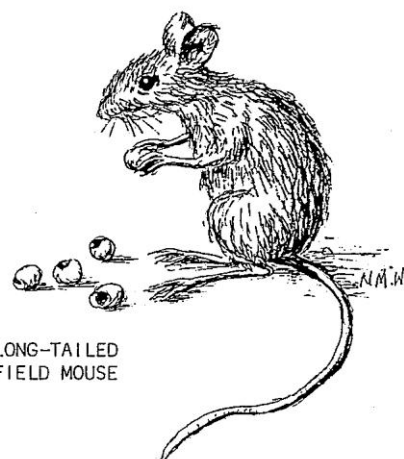
FOX

The Rabbit was once numerous in many parts of the Common, but with the advent of myxomatosis it disappeared altogether. However, in more recent times, it has reappeared in small numbers around Woodcote.

The Weasel is present in most areas but in somewhat smaller quantity than in the past. Its main food was the rabbit, and its decline is no doubt due indirectly to myxomatosis. However, its presence has been maintained. The Grey Squirrel we all see, not only in the woods but in our own gardens. It hibernates in the winter in holes in trees. It seems to have few predators, although the Weasel may account for some, and it is frequently attacked, quite unsuccessfully, by Magpies. An introduced species, and a great pest, it has quite replaced our native Red Squirrel in these parts.

Rats are to be found near our ponds, and these, together with the abundant mice, voles and shrews in the long grass areas, form a considerable food supply for a number of birds. In fact, if it wasn't for the birds these rodents might become a considerable nuisance to those people who live nearby. This is one of the delicate balances in nature that must not be disturbed.

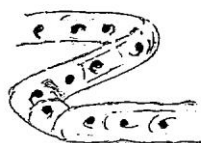
In a number of places there are colonies of moles which seem to be fairly safe from predators and can be very damaging in our gardens. A more welcome visitor from the Common is our delightful friend, the Hedgehog.



LONG-TAILED
FIELD MOUSE

We have two species of snake, the Grass Snake and the Adder, the former normally found near water and other wet places, and the Adder, which is of course, poisonous, generally found in the woodland along Christchurch Road.

The Grass Snakes grow to as much as four feet long and are quite harmless. Finally we must not forget those charming amphibians, the Frogs, Toads and Newts, the distinctive spawn of the first two groups being shown above. The mixture of still water alongside areas that are of a heavy and damp nature are ideal for such creatures.

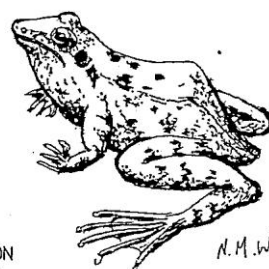


TOADSPAWN -



FROGSPAWN -

both about 5 days after laying.



COMMON
FROG

This then is the heritage that has been bequeathed to us by the generations that have gone before. Our Common is an amenity that has been protected over the centuries by Lords of the Manor, Acts of Parliament, but above all by the people who have lived here. It is now our responsibility to carry on this task of preservation: the dangers of encroachment, misuse and destruction in this mechanised age are greater than ever before. We must be constantly vigilant.

COMMON SHREW



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BIRCHES and BRACKEN - two of the delights of the Common. In winter, especially when wet, the dead bracken is as colourful as any autumn tint, and, seen alongside the silver of the birch trunks and short green grasses, can be a most rewarding sight.

ADDENDA

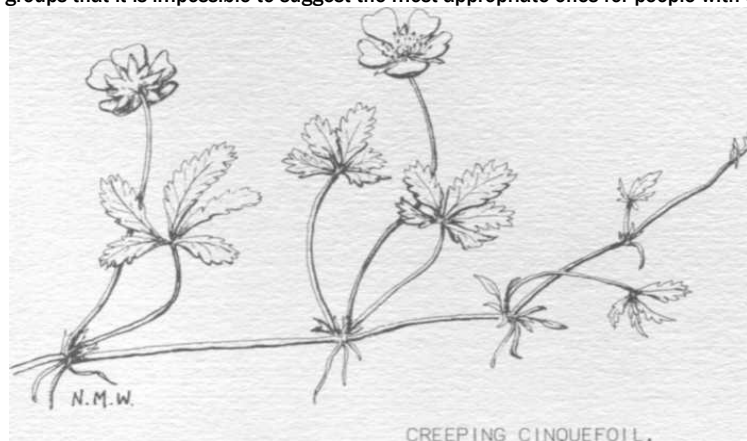
Since the previous printing several additional butterflies and birds have been recorded and are mentioned below, together with some omitted accidentally. It would be impracticable to detail all the flowering plants and a complete list is available separately. We also have reference lists of fungi and spiders.

Butterflies (p 62 et seq.) Silver-washed fritillary, white-letter hairstreak, ringlet, brown argus, holly blue, small blue.

Birds (p 68 et seq.) Many of the new species are associated with water and have arrived since the restoration of the Great Pond.
Great Crested Grebe, Grey Lag Goose, Cormorant, Gadwall, Gar-ganey, Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon, Hobby, Red Legged Partridge, Water Rail, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Redshank, Short-eared Owl, Grey Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail, Wood Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Waxwing, Willow Tit, Corn Bunting, Jackdaw, Rook.

Amphibia (p 75) The edible frog has been seen almost certainly deliberately introduced.

P 67 Ancient oak. This tree has been pollarded as it was becoming dangerous. P 54 Books for identification - The original edition specified a few books for identification of insects and plants. Since then so many new books have been produced covering different groups that it is impossible to suggest the most appropriate ones for people with different interests and standards.'



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