

Fig. 1: Epsom, c. 1729; from a map by John Sennex showing A: the church, B: site of nos. 106/110 High Street and C: no. 41 South Street.

(Redrawn by S. Khan)

Some recent archaeological work in Epsom

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THE EXCAVATION WORK that the Nonsuch Antiquarian Society and Bourne Hall Museum have carried out in the town recently, though on a relatively small scale, has backed up the more general, long term work of building recording that the society and individuals have undertaken there intermittently over a number of years.

Though not in London, Epsom in the 17th and early 18th century seems to have had quite a

connection with London in terms of both economic and, more significantly, its social life—a surprising occurrence for a hitherto small village some 20 miles from the City.

Epsom is well-known in most peoples minds for two things—the Derby and its salts. The salts came first and were the result of a fortunate discovery early in the 17th century of the possible beneficial qualities of a spring on Epsom Common, about



Fig. 2: View of High Street site before demolition in 1969. No. 110 is the larger building gable-end to the street.

half a mile from the town. The site of this early well still exists, though now 'fossilised' in the centre of the Wells council house estate. This event was particularly early for interest in natural spring mineral waters and Epsom was to prosper from this discovery. After *c* 1620 when the spring appears first to have been recognised the town enjoyed visits from fashionable people and expanded in consequence as one of the country's first spas. There are a number of references by eminent visitors to the town in the 17th century. Not all, however, were necessarily complimentary and there were many fluctuations in the fortune of the town most especially over the management and marketing of the 'waters'. Celia Fiennes, writing early in the eighteenth century, was particularly scathing.¹ Although some 20 miles from London its proximity was apparently attracting more middle class patrons and this may have coloured her impressions. It is apparent, however, that provision for visitors, in terms of entertainment and accommodation, was scanty until quite late in the century. Pepys stayed at both Ashted and Ewell on some of his visits. However, by the 1680/90s there are increasing documentary references to new buildings and land transactions; one of the most famous of Epsom buildings, the Assembly Rooms (now known as Waterloo House), being built in about 1693. Commercial interest is reflected in the greater numbers of documents that survive and studies of which are telling us much of the development at this time.² The attentions of a Dr.

Livingstone just after 1700, it has been argued³, stimulated an even higher degree of sophistication with more public rooms, taverns, coffee shops and a new well being developed. This Dr. Livingstone seems to have been an entrepreneur of some force and he consolidated the attractions of the town, albeit for a short period as this revitalisation seems not to have lasted for long after his death in 1727.

To a great extent it is this later, revitalised Spa Period, that shaped the form of Epsom and resulted in much of the townscape that we see today. However, in spite of quite a wealth of architectural detail remaining the town has suffered sadly in recent years from the depredations of piecemeal and ill-planned demolition. I shall not dwell on the subject of demolition of old buildings but a list of the structures demolished or allowed to collapse in Epsom makes sad reading and many of these buildings dated from the 'later' Spa Period of early 18th century. We may note the expansion of the town to the west, along the High Street, away from the presumed old nucleus around the church on the slope of the chalk to the east (Fig. 1). The nature of the medieval, or indeed Saxon settlement presumed from its name—Ebbesham, is uncertain but the church, though much altered, encases a tower similar to the 15th century old church tower at Ewell and the oldest domestic building of Epsom survives in part of the structure of the Hermitage in Church Street, *c* 1620.

No archaeological work had been carried out in the town other than some trial trenches in 1974 to trace the line of Roman Stane Street where it passes near to the church and observation of two wells exposed in building works in 1968 behind 115 High Street. In 1980 two large-scale developments were proposed for the town which would affect such large areas that the society felt that at least some trial work should be done. There was little or no interest at official level and all the society could attempt was to choose an area from each site, which was assumed to contain the earliest buildings, and to excavate these.

The first area (Fig. 1) centred on a little complex of timber-framed buildings (nos. 106/110, Fig. 2) on the north side of the High Street demolished so rapidly in 1969 that little time was available for adequate plans to be made and only odd items were salvaged for the museum including part of a 17th century wooden staircase from no. 106. A

1. *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes* Ed. C. Morris (1947), 121 & 337.

2. Research by Dr. Lehmann on the documentary background to Epsom has in recent years revealed much

detail of persons and buildings and I am indebted to him for information on this.

3. 'The History of Epsom Spa', F. L. Clark, *Surrey Archaeol Coll* 57 (1960), 1-41.

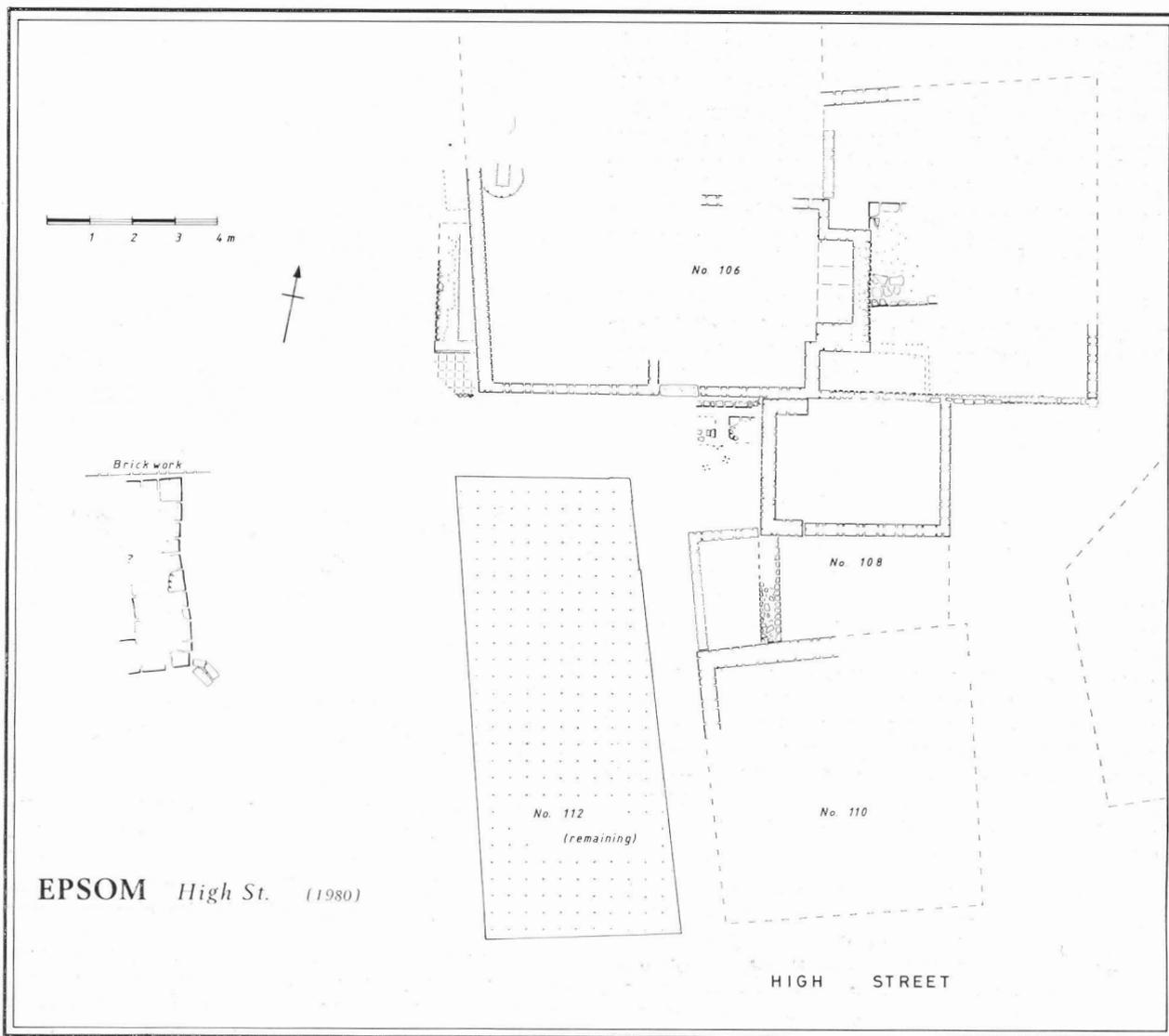


Fig. 3: Plan of excavated features, High Street site.

car park surface covered the brick foundations of at least three houses (Fig. 3). The rear structure, though much altered by a 19th century industrial building, had begun as a two or three bayed unit parallel to the High Street built in brick with projecting chimney stacks faced in flint and apparently of 17th century date slightly later than had originally been suggested during demolition in 1969. This had been extended to the east in the 18th century. A further structure had been built separately, gable-end on to the street and observation, during demolition, of its large front window

suggested that it had originally been built as a shop. The sequence of construction of these two buildings was uncertain but they had been connected quite early by an infill structure one room wide. The whole complex overlay at its eastern end a thick, rammed chalk 'raft'. Although nothing diagnostic was recovered from below this 'raft' it seems connected with an earlier phase. A hard surface for the floor of a barn or similar structure was suggested but it was not possible to investigate this any further. Similar 'rafts' of chalk have been observed elsewhere in Epsom and they may be

a building practice dictated by the very wet nature of this end of the town. An unusual vessel of "casserole" shape, in Later Surrey White Ware of presumably mid-17th century date, was found fairly intact set into this chalk beneath the rear building levels. It was completely unworn, below an upper damaged level, where use of this area as a coal-hole had resulted in the upper portion being sliced away, and it is tempting to see this vessel as a deliberate burial beneath a floor perhaps near a threshold.⁴

Later contractor's work on the site revealed little extra information on the buildings but slightly to the west a further short line of foundation was exposed. It proved impossible to trace its full extent and although it was of 17th century date it included roughly shaped blocks of Reigate stone and, most significantly, a large sandstone arch voussoir with heavily carved chevron moulding. This voussoir block is from the arch of a large doorway showing three lines of chevrons in at least one of its orders. Rough calculation from the shape of the block would seem to indicate a door opening of some 8 or 9 feet width.⁵ A source for this medieval masonry in Epsom would appear to be from Nonsuch Palace, which was being sold as standing rubble in the 1680s, and which in turn of course had obtained much of its stone from Merton Priory at the Dissolution.⁶ The 'reuse' of Merton Priory and Nonsuch Palace material is well-known in the area. This striking voussoir block, probably of 12th century date, would have formed part of one of the more enriched doorways at Merton.

To the south of the High Street a more extensive development was planned but one which would not significantly obtrude on to the High Street frontage where many buildings are listed. In view of the limited archaeological damage apparently involved we chose to excavate a single timber-framed, two-bayed, narrow structure no. 41 South Street (Fig. 4). Architecturally we had suggested an early 17th century date for this building with its large, central brick chimney stack and roof timbers. However, archaeological levels, where they survived, indicated a date later in the century. The side wall and part of the rear wall had been rebuilt and there was difficulty in reconciling the archaeological evidence with the above ground structure (Fig. 5). The 'H' shaped brick chimney stack



Fig. 4: No. 41 South Street c. 1968.

seemed very large for such a minor building but was an original feature.⁷ It also showed many phases of reconstruction; the original 6ft width hearth being progressively narrowed with later blocking. The very last construction being the insertion of a 1930s gas fire the base of which just remained in place!

During the initial stages of construction work on this South Street Development site in 1981 a watch was kept, by the Borough's museum staff, under Mr. S. Khan, on the massive earthmoving operations which eventually stripped off all the overburden of the whole building site (some 3 acres) down to the sands and gravels of the Reading Beds that cover this area of the town. The effect of this site clearance was to expose almost every feature deeper than c 0.75m (2½ft) which in essence meant every cess-pit, rubbish pit and well behind the South Street and High Street properties at this west end. Altogether some 20 features were recorded though not all were excavated in entirety and they varied greatly in nature. Some rubbish pits were unlined and fairly shallow, others were brick or stone lined and several wells were constructed from chalk blocks. The wells were fairly shallow as the water-table, even now, is high and it was not always possible to determine the original purpose of all features. They were obviously disused at different times though the majority would seem to date from the 18th or

4. 'A Witch-Bottle from Aldgate', C. Maloney, *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 31 (1980), 157.

5. I am grateful to Derek Renn who pointed out to me the significance of this block and helped calculate the possible door width.

6. *The Quest for Nonsuch*, J. Dent (1961), 211/216.

7. These quite massive chimney stacks are apparently normal for even insubstantial buildings in London area. Two have been excavated in Old Bridge Street, Kingston recently and in 1974 a terrace of 4 were

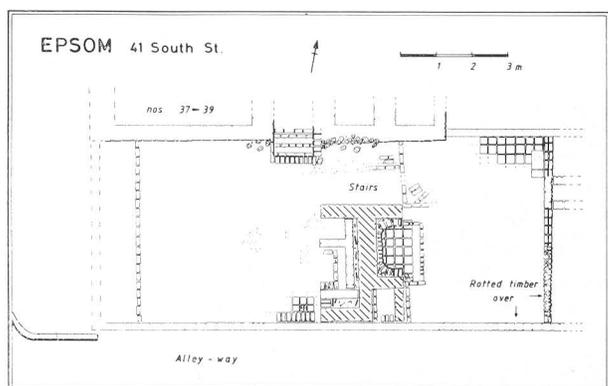


Fig. 5: Plan of excavated features, no. 41 South Street.

early 19th century, and varying quantities of material were recovered from each one. Nearly all, however, provided groups of some size and a few groups proved to be most substantial. By far the largest and most varied group came from the waterlogged fill of a large (c 2m x 3m; 6½ft x 10ft) 'tank', presumably a cess-pit or settling tank. This survived 0.75m (2½ft) deep below the level of machining which had removed about 0.25m (10in) of its upper courses. It was constructed of brick and Reigate stone blocks which on removal proved to be carved; about 14 blocks were removed and these included window reveal shafts, door jambs and arch vaulting blocks. As with the carved masonry from the High Street site (see page 258) these blocks were presumed to have come from Nonsuch Palace and again originally from Merton Priory. The objects recovered from the fill of the pit (Figs. 6 and 7) were extremely varied including water-logged items of leather (shoes), textiles (woolens, lace and silk) and wood (structural fittings, a wooden box, mallet head or gavel, spinning tops, pins or skittles and a dice shaker with its die). Domestic food bone refuse was rare but intriguingly, some 10+ dog (?greyhound) skulls were distributed throughout the pit and cherry pips survived in quantity.

Pottery was less prominent but comprised two tin-glazed dishes, drug-jars, imported porcelain (probably Japanese rather than Chinese) and earthenware and stoneware tankards. One small (¾pt) salt-glazed stoneware tankard bears a plaque depicting a long-beaked bird (?crane) in a bush with a name beneath unfortunately too fragmentary to decipher. A high proportion of wine bottles and drinking glasses survived, some of the bottles bear-

ing initialled seals of W W and one almost complete bottle retained its cork tied with cord and wax-sealed with an (? vintner's) impression E B. Examples occurred of long necked glass flasks, which are presumed to have been imported from France; one neck of which retained part of its woven rafia cover. These vessels are seen in quantity in contemporary prints (especially those of Hogarth's drinking scenes) where they are usually completely encased in rafia, they are, however, surprisingly uncommon in excavated groups of the first half of the 18th century. Clay tobacco pipes also occurred in very large numbers (some 230 of which 45 have been reassembled to full length). Many are marked with their maker's name—Lawrence Geale of Guildford and W Pemerton, hitherto unknown as a maker but assumed also to be from Guildford. This group of pipes comprises probably the greatest number of complete pipes yet excavated and as they are the products of only two makers will provide us with much information on relative use of types, moulds and stamps, etc. A preliminary study has been made on this and work continues⁸.

Other objects in the group comprised a bronze bell, thimble, a pewter tankard (or wine measure) (with stamped initials W W R and touch mark of the second half of 17th century) and, providing a very useful *terminus post quem* date, a gold mourning ring. The ring has no hall mark but is engraved with the date 1707 (Fig. 7).

This whole deposit clearly dates to the first quarter of the 18th century, probably c 1715-20 but contains some earlier late 17th century material (e.g. the pewter tankard, tin-glazed dishes). It is presumably the result of the wholesale clearance of a public building, almost certainly an inn—the 'gaming' aspect of many of the objects is striking—though there are problems with attribution to a known property. The nearest public house was the New Tavern, in the Assembly Rooms, but this name does not seem to match the design on the stoneware tankard. An initial study of documentary sources has revealed some names of owners of property nearby though not necessarily of the plot concerned. A William Richardson is known in the late 17th century and Sir William Stewart, barber-surgeon and Lord Mayor of London in 1721 and who died in 1723 owned property in the area and had as a tenant William Woodforde. All these initials obviously provide a link with the objects and it is hoped that further research, which continues, will clarify the ownership and property

excavated at Aldgate, 'An Excavation at Aldgate'; A. Thompson, *London Archaeol* 2, No. 12 (1975), 317 - 319.

8. 'Surrey Clay Tobacco Pipes', D. Higgins in *The Archaeology of the Clay Tobacco Pipe*, VI Ed. P. J. Davey, Brit. Archaeol. Reports (1981) fig. 33 p.274.



Fig. 6: Some of the material from early 18th century stone lined pit on South Street site.
Photo: Philip Craven

concerned.⁹

This recent excavation and salvage recording has underlined the assumption that the development of the High Street, as a western extension to the old village around the church on the higher ground, resulted directly from the expansion of the town as a spa. We suspect that there were one or two buildings, pre-dating the 17th century, out in the common fields that existed over this western area and this is probably the reason for the large chalk 'raft' under nos. 106/110 High Street. The common fields with their medieval strips survived for a long time, the Enclosures being quite late in coming to Epsom and, in fact, the outlines of the medieval selions remain as narrow building plots in a number of smaller roads away from the main High Street (e.g. Prospect Place and off the Parade). By far the greatest amount of building took place in the later, second half of the 17th century; both small vernacular buildings and superior houses in brick were built on the High

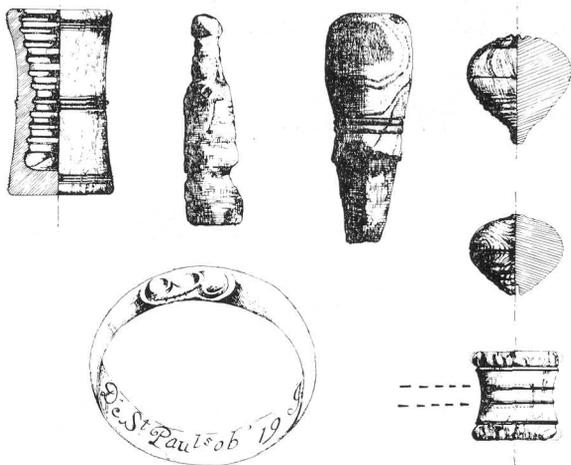
Street and out along South Street (formerly New Inn Lane) which led to the old well.¹⁰ Some of these buildings were quite imposing and the apparent boom in construction over this period would seem to have approached almost the dimensions of a 'new town'. It is also suspected that this sudden expansion in building may have provided a filip for the development of the unusual building technique of the use of brick-tiles. Although not certain it is suspected that the earliest example of the use of this distinctive type of tile-hanging, which provided an imitation brick facade, survived until 1979 in the main walls of West Hill House off West Street. This building was unfortunately allowed to be demolished but many other examples of quite early brick-tiled buildings remain in the Epsom and Ewell area.¹¹

Many of the smaller timber-framed buildings of Epsom would also seem to date from this later 17th century period. The two groups of structures that we excavated were of this date and the brick

9. A full report on this important group is in preparation by the author which it is hoped will appear in *Post-Medieval Archaeology*.

10. 'Old Houses of Epsom', C. S. Willis, *Surrey Archaeol Coll* 51 (1949) 110 - 133.

11. *Mathematical Tiles — Notes of a Symposium at Ewell 1981* Ed. M. Exwood (1981).



W.S.D. St Paul's ob. 19 June 1707

Fig. 7: Dated gold mourning ring (not to scale) and other wooden objects at 1 : 4 from the stone lined pit. Drawings: S Khan

cottage block nos. 47/51 South Street, next to our first site no. 41, has been retained in the new development, and revealed during its renovation many internal features of the mid to late 17th century (wood panelling and some early wallpaper). A number of samples of 17th century wallpapers have been recovered from houses in Epsom in the last few years¹² and this again reflects the prosperity of the town at this time and its contact with contemporary modes and fashion. It was only in the second half of the 17th century that the use of wallpaper squares became more widespread. The front elevation of this block also showed, after

removal of the 19th century rendering, long-and-short Reigate stone quoins in one corner. This is a feature of many larger brick buildings in the town of this date.

Recent renovation of no. 8 Chalk Lane has shown this house to be part of a substantial timber-framed building of 17th century date.¹³ Early features in its carpentry (riding crucks forming the bays of the roof timbers and moulded window frames blocked up in the front wall) would seem to indicate a date in the 1670s or 1680s. The house was obviously in occupation long enough for rubbish to have accumulated at the rear by the early 18th century. One pit fortuitously discovered during drain laying operations contained clay pipes, wine bottles and a nearly complete Staffordshire slipware posset pot signed J. Simpson, all of about 1700.

I must thank Norman Nail and Ian West of the Society for help with the excavation and advice on the buildings of Epsom and all those other members who helped excavate and backfill. The salvage work on the South Street development site was undertaken almost singlehandedly by Sean Khan and Valerie Griffiths of Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell where the vast quantity of material now resides. They were able to visit the site so frequently and at short notice (often in poor weather) that we were fairly certain to have plotted nearly every feature of significance during building operations. The co-operation of Messrs. Bredero (UK) and especially their Mr. Van Dyke in allowing full facilities for this work is gratefully acknowledged. My thanks are also due to Dr. Lehmann of the society for his explanation of much of the documentary background.

12. 'Early English Wallpapers', Jean Hamilton, *Connoisseur* (July 1977), 201/6.

13. *Pers. comm.* I J West.

Letter

PLANNING FRAMES

I WAS INTERESTED to read Mr Adkins' account of the manufacture of drawing frames. It occurred to me that readers of *the London Archaeologist* might be interested to know of an engineer in the London region who will produce welded tubular steel drawing frames for £7.50 each. These have been made to my own design for my excavation in Cornwall.

They are not much heavier than a wooden frame, much more durable and have the added advantage of being 1m externally enabling use into corners of a site. As they have welded corners they are not, of course, collapsable, but conversely they are easy to clean and it is impossible for earth to get into the tubular body.

The frames are drilled for stringing not in the centre but 5mm from the edge and thus are more easily used on stony surfaces, strings are c.20cm off the ground. My own frames are strung with stainless steel wire, although this is at some extra cost (about £3.00), and problems of string tension etc are eliminated. I am told that other stringing materials would be available if required for a lesser cost (string at about £1.50) but even the most expensive version of the strung frame (c £10.50 each) compares favourably with the do-it-yourself "Adkins' model" frame which would cost £12 each, plus valuable site time and effort.

If anyone is interested I shall be happy to pass on their enquiry to the manufacturer.

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