

THE HISTORY OF EPSOM SPA



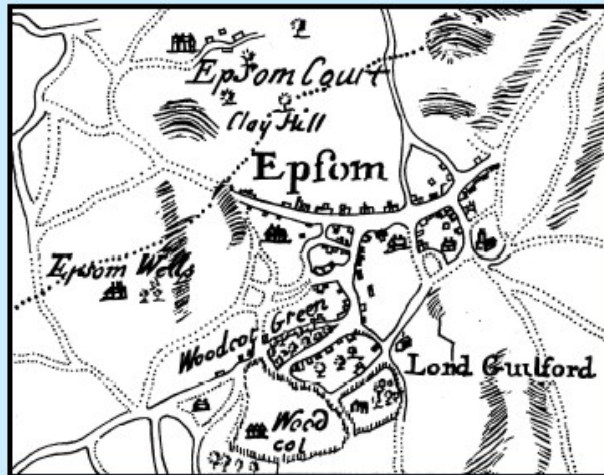
The Old Wells, as drawn by William Schellinks on his visit of 5th June 1662



The Well House at Epsom Common in 1796, when part of the Assembly Rooms had been turned into a cottage

Epsom provided not just the spa waters, but a wealth of entertainment, to occupy its visitors. Thomas Shadwell's play *Epsom Wells*, first performed in 1672, depicted contemporary life at a spa with characters more interested in wine and amorous adventures - both on and off the bowling green - than in the health-giving benefits of its waters.

After the discovery of a spring on Epsom Common in 1618, which proved to have medicinal qualities, people started visiting to drink the waters. Epsom soon became established as a spa town and over the next 120 years grew to accommodate and entertain the increasing numbers of visitors.



A map of Epsom in 1729, showing the Old Epsom Wells

The original Epsom Well drew visitors from London and beyond to benefit from its purging waters. By the 1660s the enclosed well stood together with a small house, with rooms for people to shelter from the sun.

Early in the spa's history there was only a single inn in the village and visitors had to find lodging in farmhouses in the area; by the 1660s there were at least 300 beds and this still was not enough to cater for those wishing to take the waters.



The site of the New Well is behind the Symonds Well public house

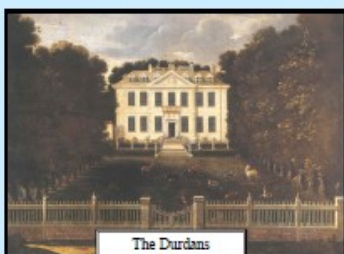
By 1700 a new well had been sunk by a Mr. Symonds in the town itself, and around it developed coffee shops, inns, assembly rooms and shops. Wealthy residents were drawn to the town, new houses were built, and houses such as the Durdans, Woodcote House and Woodcote Park upgraded.



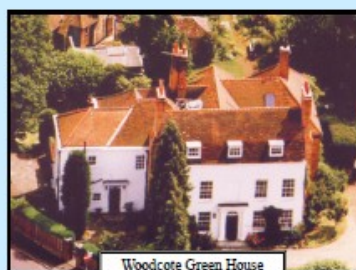
The first entertainment complex was behind the present Assembly Rooms

Pepys visited Epsom twice, first in 1663, then again in 1667. On his first visit he had trouble engaging lodgings and had to stay in Ashted. He took the waters and watched running races on the Downs.

By Pepys' second visit there were two bowling greens, one on Clay Hill (now West Hill) and the second behind The New Tavern at the corner of High Street and South Street. By the end of the 17th century the New Tavern had become part of a brick building including a coffee house, assembly rooms, a cockpit and brewhouse. The building survives as The Assembly Rooms.



The Durdans



Woodcote Green House



Woodcote House