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East Molesey (Kent Town) Conservation Area

**East Molesey (Kent Town) Conservation Area
(Designated by Surrey County Council – 18 December 1973
Extended – 23 November 1994 and 18 May 2000)**

Statement of Designation

East Molesey sits on the south bank of the River Thames some 2 miles west of Kingston and across the river from Hampton Court Palace. Its historic centre, around St. Mary's Church, is related more to the River Mole than the later crossing point of the Thames, while the modern settlement lies between the two. The Conservation Area is that part comprising the more formal layout of the mid and late Victorian period, with tree-lined streets, detached houses and mature, well treed gardens, along with Bridge Road and the riverside area which links at mid-stream with an area designed by the London Borough of Richmond.

Some earlier forms of the place-name have been MULESEG (675), MOLESHAM (1086), MULSEY (1189) and MOULSEY (1569). These are taken to indicate 'Mul's island' in this area of flat land which was formerly, no doubt, marshy.

At Domesday Survey (1086) East and West Molesey consisted of three manors, all called Molesham. Parochially they first appear as two chapelries, later parishes and then in 1895 formed one urban district.

The local manors were acquired by Henry VIII for a Royal Chase from Hampton Court Palace, but this use ceased after his death. The manors were purchased in the 17th Century by the Clarke family and in the latter part of the 18th Century by Thomas Sutton and Beaumont Hotham jointly. An Enclosure Act of 1815 brought a consolidation of holdings and in 1819 the whole of Molesey Matham manor was offered for sale to facilitate the settlement of Sir Thomas Sutton's will. The King also sold the land that had been granted to him as owner of Molesey Prior, and together these two units were sold in over a dozen lots.

However, a consolidation into one ownership followed shortly in 1847-50 when Francis Jackson Kent and his son bought a large area of land, laid out roads and commenced development. A block of land, now forming the area between Hurst Lane and Manor Road, was sold to the Westminster Freehold Land Syndicate and they too undertook development, but of a tighter form of layout and with smaller houses. The Kents were active in what are now Palace, Wolsey, Arnison and Church Roads, and on Francis Kent's application the existing parish of St. Mary's was split and the Church of St. Paul's built as a focal point for the new streets. The old parish church was too small for the expanding town and St. Paul's was built in the mid-1850's at Kent's own expense. By 1867 (1st Edtn. O.S.) there had been a large increase in private residents and in the local trades. It was said that the population has doubled since 1851, and to the end of the Century this trend continued and produced a considerable suburban area. Kelly's Directory of 1890 also noted that "The Parish derives much prosperity from its proximity to Hampton Court Palace and Bushey Park, the river here being also a great attraction. There are several hotels and refreshment houses for excursionists". By 1900 there was a slowing of the rate of growth, but this re-established itself locally in the inter-war period. Since the 2nd world war there has been some infilling of the larger plots and a small amount of redevelopment. Both have been controlled to ensure retention of important trees and the undeveloped back gardens, and to retain the traditional building line. The larger properties are often converted into flats and some are partly in professional use. A high proportion of the Victorian buildings remain and although with certain exceptions the merit of the individual buildings is not outstanding, the attraction of much of the Conservation Area lies in it being a good example of Victorian domestic architecture and planning, producing a residential environment of a high value.

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