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Thames Ditton Conservation Area

Thames Ditton Conservation Area (Designated by Surrey County Council 31 July 1973)

Statement of Designation

Thames Ditton sits on the south bank of the River Thames, opposite Hampton Court park, where the river takes a wide loop to the south, and it thus lies on the route that follows the outside of this bend. It is about two miles south-west of Kingston and forms a tightly knit settlement with a complex local road pattern, which makes it more of a roadside than a riverside village.

Some earlier forms of the place-name have been DICTUN (1005), DITONE (1086), TEMES DITTON (1235) and THEMSDITTON (1607). The earlier forms indicate the farm (tun) by the dike or ditch (dic) and the addition of the river name is descriptive of its location.

The Church of St. Nicholas is of Norman and later periods, much restored by Ferrey in 1864. The lower portion of the tower dates from the early 13th Century and is low and broad with a weather boarded top stage and spike. The boarded portion was added when a new set of bells were cast for the church in 1753 and envelopes the lower portion of the spire. Of the fittings, the font is Norman and there are a number of good brasses. This was once a chapelry of Kingston and was only separated by an Act of Parliament in 1769. In 1895 Thames Ditton formed part of an Urban District with Esher and Long Ditton. There does not appear to have been a manor in the parish known exclusively as the manor of Thames Ditton. The name is applied to a manor in deeds of the Evelyn family in the 17th Century, but probably as an alias for the manor of Claygate.

Perhaps surprisingly Thames Ditton has an interesting industrial history. In 1874 a bronze foundry was built in Summer Road by Cox and Company, celebrated Victorian ecclesiastical craftsmen and furnishers, specifically for the cast of statues. A series of import commissions were undertaken and included Cromwell (outside the House of Commons), Robert Burns and Dr. Livingstone (Glasgow), and Captain Cook (Sydney, Australia). After 1880 there was a

series of owners and further important commissions, particularly of Queen Victoria. After the 1st World War there was a large output of war memorials and the foundry's fame was worldwide. Production ceased in 1939 and the craftsmen dispersed into war work.

Another important industry in Thames Ditton was the activity of A.C. Cars who were in the area from the early part of this Century and whose buildings still occupy a prominent position and a large area of land in the heart of the village. In the early 1920's the firm purchased High House, the family home of the Vernell family, and built a small factory in its grounds. The house was later demolished and the factory was constantly enlarged.

Until the latter part of the 19th Century, the village was small and picturesque, but in 1911 the Victoria County History of Surrey said that "the older houses are now rapidly disappearing to make room for small riverside villas and bungalows". Local directories indicate that until the 1880's there had been only a gradual increase in private residents and local traders, but from this time and particularly between 1895 and 1915 the increases were very substantial. The inter and post-war periods have brought further development in the area.

However, the centre of the village, which forms the basis of the Conservation Area, retains its historic form, road pattern and many of its buildings of architectural or historic interest.

For more information, please email us at [**tplan@elmbridge.gov.uk**](mailto:tplan@elmbridge.gov.uk)