



Cobham Conservation Area
(Designated by Surrey County Council – 31 July 1973)

Statement of Designation

Cobham lies some four miles south-west of Esher and four miles north-west of Leatherhead in the valley of the River Mole. It sits on relatively low-lying land just north of the river where it has meandered north-west from Leatherhead and at the point where it turns in a large sweep south-west, north-west and then north again towards the Thames. The historic centre is around the outside edge of a northward meander of the river and formerly continued north along High Street. The Mole has, of course, been of considerable importance in determining the pattern of growth of the area. Smaller settlements formed nearby at Cobham Street, Cobham Tilt and Downside, but the first two now comprise part of the larger built-up area that has grown from Victorian times. This development has taken place particularly to the north, east and south-east and has helped to change the character of the village centre. However, Mill Road, River Hill and Church Street retain several buildings of architectural or historic interest and others that contribute to the street scene, and with the River Mole these parts form the basis of the Conservation Area.

Some earlier forms of the place-name have been COVEHAM (675, 933 et al), COVENHAM (1086 et al), COBBEHAM (1434) and COHAM al COBHAM (1570). These are taken to indicate the farm or settlement of Cofa, the same personal name from which Coventry derives. The development of the name to Cobham is uncertain and entirely irregular.

The Church of St. Andrew dates from the 12th Century, but generally was restored and enlarged in 1853, 1872, 1886 and 1902. The lower portion of the tower is Norman with an internal arch to the nave, and the south doorway is of the same period, a standard type with zig-zag and billet moulding. There is a blocked lancet of the 12th Century in the chancel north wall and three re-used 15th Century windows in the south aisle. The remainder is restoration and enlargement.

Cobham Manor formed part of the possessions of the Abbot and Convent of Chertsey for many centuries, and at Domesday Survey (1086) they held it with three mills. In 1537 it was transferred to the King in return for £5,000, and after being granted to George and Elizabeth Bigley in 1553 it passed through many hands by sale or succession.

About half mile north-east of the centre is the site of a small, early Romano-British settlement. The underlying gravel was suited to the dwellers, whose drainage skills were limited, for it provided a relatively dry location. Evidence was found of pit dwellings and the circles of simple hut constructions, all probably dating from the 1st Century A.D. Nearby was also found a cinerary urn of the Bronze Age.

From at least Domesday Survey (1086) there have been mills hereabouts on the River Mole. Cobham Mill was active until the 1930's and a part still remains. It was essentially two mills in one, in that it had two wheels working alongside each other driving independent gear, in buildings separated by the race but connected with a passageway. The two parts were erected between 1800 and 1804 after the previous mill had been washed away in 1799 to the financial ruin of the miller. The larger building jutted into the highway and was demolished in 1953 to allow widening. The remaining, smaller part was partially restored during 1968 by the Urban District Council with financial assistance from the County Council.

Pigot and Company's Directory of 1839 said of Cobham that "In trade this place has little to boast, but there are some well-furnished shops, two breweries and the like number of corn mills". There were at that time several private residents in the locality, generally occupying large houses in considerable grounds, while in the village were many shopkeepers and traders; the Post Office Directory of 1845 explained that "The trade of the village consists chiefly upon the great throughfare on the road". During the 19th Century there was a gradual increase in both the number of private residents and the volume of commercial activities in the Cobham area. This became greater around the turn of the century, being partly related to the opening of the London and South-Western Railway with a station at Stoke D'Abernon to the south-east. Development continued during the inter and post-war periods and has brought pressures for further development and redevelopment in the historic village centre, particularly the High Street area. However, the line of older development around the curve of the Mole, from Pyports to Cedar House, retains its character and forms the basis of the Conservation Area.

For more information, please email us at tplan@elmbridge.gov.uk

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