

Review of Summer/Autumn 2007

- The Ellenor Hospice sponsored walk on 15th July was a great success, attracting nearly 500 people and raising £18,500. There were three routes each of 3, 5 and 8 miles around the Park and Ranscombe Farm, starting and ending at Cobham Hall. This was the first time the walk had used the Park as its venue, and is set to be repeated next year on 13th July.
- The West Kent Downs Countryside Trust once again ran a 'Woodland Safari', which took less able bodied enthusiasts to explore the woods and surrounding countryside, and which included a well received stop at the Darnley Mausoleum.
- A series of walks were run in early September to promote newly opened permissive footpaths in Cobham Wood, and to explain first hand the restoration works taking place. It is evident that the new routes are already gaining popularity.
- A November repeat of last year's 'Fungi Foray' in Ashenbank Wood again proved popular, led again by local expert Jo Weightman. Despite a recent dry spell, there was still enough on the ground to keep everybody entertained.
- Other walks were also run in the summer, including a Fathers Day hike with local girl guides, and the usual promotion took place at the annual and ever popular Cobham Fete.



The Ellenor Hospice Walk

Photograph courtesy of the Ellenor Foundation

- Volunteers from the North West Kent Countryside Partnership were active in the summer, performing excellent work in Cobham Wood, including repairs to stock fencing and installation of a horse stile and bridle gate.
- Valued assistance was also provided throughout the autumn by Kent County Council's Youth Offending Team.

Cobham Park events

Walks and talks

Monday 18 February
Winter Walk. Starts at 10am, outside South Lodge, Lodge Lane, Cobham, DA12 3BS. Likely to take 2-3 hours. Please contact 01474 337530 or ben.sweeney@gravesham.gov.uk

Saturday 1 March
Presentation on the Cobham Park Heritage Project by Ben Sweeney, at Gravesend Towncentric. Starts at 11am. Please contact Towncentric on 01474 338000 for more information.

Volunteering
Tree planting events in the Park are planned for the following dates:
Wednesday 20 February, Sunday 24 February, Sunday 16 March
All start at 10am, South Lodge, Lodge Lane, Cobham, DA12 3BS. Likely to last 3 hours. Please contact 01474 337530 or ben.sweeney@gravesham.gov.uk



All events are free, but it is essential that places are booked in advance. Please be aware that ground may be uneven and muddy, so suitable footwear should be worn. Access is not suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs.

More local opportunities

All of the projects in this area have opportunities for voluntary work. Forthcoming specific event days for volunteers are listed below. But volunteering is not limited to these days. If you are interested in doing your bit then please get in touch with the project of your choice at the contact point stated.

Jeskyns

The Forestry Commission are running the following volunteer days to help create and develop this new community greenspace.

Saturday 5 January, Saturday 16 February, Saturday 29 March

For further details contact: Tel: 01474 825118
email: jeskynsranger@forestry.gsi.gov.uk web: www.forestry.gov.uk/jeskyns

West Kent Downs Countryside Trust

The Trust will be running volunteer activities throughout the winter, including a range of work in the 'Leisure Plot' area of Cobham Woods.

Saturday 12 January, Sunday 17 February, Saturday 8 March

For further details contact Sue Quarendon on 07949 231188

Ranscombe Farm

Volunteers are meeting on the following Wednesdays to help with the management of grasslands and glades within the Plantlife reserve

9 & 23 January, 6 & 20 February, 5 & 19 March

For further details contact Helen Morley on 07983 578201
helen.morley@plantlife.org.uk

Other events

Sunday 13 January, Orienteering event at Shorne Wood Country Park with the Dartford Orienteering Klubb. Visit www.dfok.co.uk for further details.

For update on events, general news and further pictures visit the CAMS website on www.cobhampark.org.uk

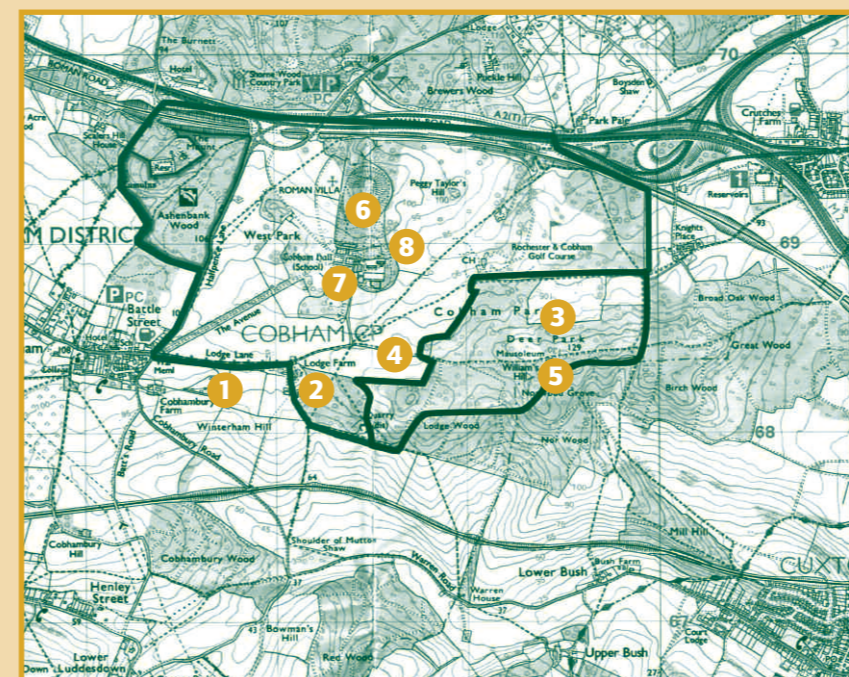
Cobham Park Heritage Project: Phase 1 Progress Checklist

	Principal Works	Tender Documents Prepared	Contracts Let	Work Started	Work Completed
1	Lodge Lane first phase improvements	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	South Lodge restoration of building	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Cobham Wood - restoration of wood pasture landscape	✓	✓	✓	
4	Mausoleum - Access Track - improvements and surfacing	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Mausoleum - external restoration and cleaning	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	North Pleasure Grounds and West Park - landscape restoration	✓	✓	✓	
7	Cobham Hall courtyards and access drive - restoration	✓	✓	✓	
8	Cobham Hall garden buildings and follies - restoration	✓	✓	✓	✓



View from Repton's Seat

Unless otherwise stated photographs courtesy of David Nessling & CAMS



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The Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) is an association of organisations working together for the management and restoration of an area of national heritage and nature conservation importance in the Kent Downs, centred on the Registered Historic Park at Cobham. The Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) is a partnership of:

- Gravesham Borough Council
- Natural England
- The National Trust
- Cobham Hall
- Kent County Council
- English Heritage
- The Woodland Trust
- Union Railways



The project is grant aided by:

ENGLISH HERITAGE



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CAMS Civic Centre, Windmill Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1AU
Tel: 01474 337530

Or you can email your details to: cams@gravesham.gov.uk

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Cobham Park News

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Darnley Mausoleum: back to its best

The first phase of the restoration of the Darnley Mausoleum was successfully completed in the early autumn. The result is stunning. There is more good news. Funding has been secured for the second and final phase, notably the full restoration of the interior. The work will now move on without a break to completion by summer 2008.



The Mausoleum before and after restoration

What has been going on?

A lot has happened over the summer months since we reported on the topping-out ceremony for the pyramid in April. In addition to selective and careful cleaning and stone repair, some major features have been put in place. These include:

- The restoration of the chapel's ceiling
- The reinstatement of the chapel floor/domed ceiling to the crypt
- The replacement of the Darnley Coat of Arms on the north face
- The recreation of the flying staircase over the moat to the chapel door



Paying tribute to PAYE

Each of these features was a major project in its own right involving complicated and highly skilled work from the craftsmen involved. There was considerable relief when the complex temporary structure supporting the chapel floor was removed and months of work was seen to be a success. To date all the visiting experts have been pleased with the finished result.

Funding news

As a vote of confidence in what has been achieved so far, funding has been secured to complete the Heritage Projects including Phase 2 of the Mausoleum. But it was a rollercoaster ride over the summer months. Disappointingly, the bid to the National Lottery, the major funder of Phase 1, was unsuccessful. As the Mausoleum is now secure and waterproof, the remaining mainly internal works failed to meet the strict criteria for priority funding from the lottery.

Fortunately, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and English Heritage came to the rescue. In their funding criteria, these bodies were able to recognise the importance of public access to the landscape and the importance of the Mausoleum in terms of the wider Thames Gateway and beyond. The significance of the Mausoleum as the centrepiece of a cluster of projects which together extend to over 1000 hectares (nearly 2500 acres) of accessible countryside, brought success to the funding bid. A truly regional park is being created, rich in history, ecology and landscape.



All smiles from the PAYE team

Darnley Mausoleum: back to its best



The Darnley Mausoleum in its setting

Marking the stage reached

A small private event took place to mark the end of phase 1 of the Mausoleum restoration and to say thank you to those who had carried out the work. This was attended by the Mayor of Gravesham, Councillor Pat Oakeshott and the Regional Director of The National Trust, Sue Saville.

It was recognised that the catalyst for the current heritage project was The Channel Tunnel Rail Link. It seemed appropriate that stage 1 of the wider heritage project should be completed in the same month that the rail link itself was fully completed. In St. Pancras and the Mausoleum, the centrepiece for both projects involved the restoration of Grade I listed buildings. The autumn was an important time for looking back and looking forward.



Presentation to the Mayor

On the menu

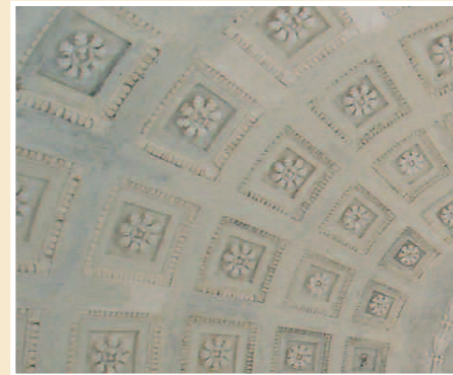
In the coming months, the agreed works at the Mausoleum will include:

- The addition of marble cladding to the columns in the chapel
- The insertion of high level painted windows to the original design
- The painting of the newly restored chapel ceiling
- The replacement of the marble alter slab
- The full repair of the internal Portland stonework
- The introduction of additional security measures and external landscaping.

The finishing post in sight

Phase 2 works at the Mausoleum are being undertaken as an extension to the current contract. Phase 1 moves seamlessly into phase 2. Because of this the immediate area around the Mausoleum continues as a building site, but only for the next six months.

As a result, any formal opening ceremony and public open day has been delayed until late spring 2008. In the meantime take a winter walk. Discover and enjoy the views of the newly restored landmark in its changing landscape setting.



Beyond the Mausoleum

At Cobham Hall

Major works to restore and improve the East Court and the Stable Yard were completed during the summer. Both are impressive. Car parking has been removed from East Court. It is now essentially a pedestrian space. Parkland fencing and gates along the main drive are in place enabling land on both sides to be grazed by cattle.

A contractual problem has meant that it has not been possible to date to carry out the planned landscaping works in North Court and to resurface the remaining section of the main drive to Cobham Hall. Hopefully this will be resolved shortly to enable Phase 1 of the Heritage Project to be completed.

The all-weather circular gravel path around The North Pleasure Grounds has been completed enabling visitors to enjoy the restored semi-formal landscape and its buildings. It is once again possible to see the whole of the Mausoleum at the end of the vista from the restored Repton's Seat.

As with Cobham Wood, the landscape restoration of The North Pleasure Grounds is on a three year programme. Agreement has now been reached with Natural England for year 2 of the programme and a contract will be let shortly.



Stable Yard before restoration



Stable Yard restored



Cattle grazing at the Hall

In Cobham Wood

For the second year in succession, Cobham Wood has been alive with activity. Further clearance of scrub and bracken has taken place together with the removal of young trees that were crowding important veterans. As a result it is now possible to visualise the finished project, a wood pasture landscape sustained by grazing.

Forgotten vistas have been reopened. The wood is once again light and airy. Visitor numbers have increased markedly. The wood is supporting much more wildlife. There has been a noticeable recovery in butterflies, bats and orchids since the undergrowth was removed.

Cobham Wood covers a large area, around 65 hectares (160 acres). The scale of the task is considerable and the range of activities is wide. This autumn contractors have used heavy plant and machinery to make an impact. Contrast this with the painstaking work of the warden and volunteers in repairing fencing and planting new trees in fire damaged areas.

And the journey is not problem free. The area is still subject to occasional incidents of vandalism. Contractors' plant has been stolen and destroyed and new stock fencing has been cut. The rash of fence cutting and the restrictions on cattle movement over the summer meant that the introduction of grazing had to be delayed. With the help of the local community, this latest spate of criminal damage appears to have been nipped in the bud. It is now anticipated that cattle will be reintroduced to the wood in spring 2008.

Meanwhile planning for a third and final year of woodland work is underway. This will include further thinning and veteran tree work together with bramble and bracken control.



Further land acquisitions

With the object of unifying the historic park and improving public access, two important areas of land are being acquired by Gravesham Borough Council on behalf of CAMS. These are the Lime Avenue and West Park.



Photograph courtesy of Gravesham Borough Council

Lime Avenue

The original Lime Avenue was planted in the seventeenth century and pre-dates the Repton landscapes. The purchase of the section of the Lime Avenue from Cobham village to the Hall grounds will assist the long-term management of this historic feature, and offers the possibility of providing public access. It could be an attractive section for many a local walk in the Cobham area.

Over the winter months and into the early spring, it is intended that restoration work will take place. This will include the clearance of vegetation encroaching at the edges and formative pruning of trees planted in the 1980s. Within the school grounds, restoration work will be more extensive and will include tree surgery and replacement planting of the order of 60 new trees.

At the village end, acquisition includes the land needed to construct a bellmouth at the entrance to Lodge Lane. Landscape improvements are desirable at this gateway to both the village and Cobham Park. However these are not possible in the short term on cost grounds as the relocation of underground services is involved.

West Park

The acquisition of West Park located between Halfpence Lane, the Lime Avenue and the Hall grounds, secures its long term management. The intention is to retain the organic grazing as the primary land use and to take the opportunity to provide a safe permissive route along the busy Halfpence Lane.

Green Light for Phase 2

Phase 1 of the Cobham Park Heritage Project was designed to complete the lions share of the task to restore the Darnley Mausoleum, Cobham Wood, South Lodge and the landscapes, courtyards and garden buildings around Cobham Hall itself. That task is now essentially complete. Phase 2 of the project is underway.

Darnley Mausoleum

The flagship element in Phase 2 is to complete the restoration of the Darnley Mausoleum. But that is not all. There are other important elements to be completed in the coming months.

South Lodge Barn

The derelict barn to the rear of South Lodge will be restored to create residential and office accommodation for a warden when the Darnley Mausoleum and Cobham Wood is handed to The National Trust. In addition it will accommodate modest visitor facilities including a shelter, toilets and interpretive material.

Advanced works including an archaeological investigation have been carried out. The timber frame has been dismantled for repair and restoration. The design incorporates modern sustainable techniques such as geo-thermal heating. The main contract will be let in January for completion by the end of June 2008.

Lodge Lane

Temporary surfacing works to Lodge Lane from Cobham Village to South Lodge have now deteriorated to an unacceptable level. Following extensive discussions with the highway authority, plans have been approved to install new drainage and an appropriate sealed surface.

A contract has been let to carry out the works. Drainage should be complete by Christmas 2007 and a sealed surface put in place in January 2008 with a final spray and chip finish added in the spring.

And still to come

In the vicinity of South Lodge Barn and either side of Lodge Lane itself, attention is turning to Lodge Farmyard. Positive discussions are taking place with the owners. Plans are being prepared to improve the appearance, security and functioning of the farmyard which occupies a prominent site at one of the main entrances to Cobham Park. These could result in the submission of planning applications in the New Year.



South Lodge Barn

Central Government turns up trumps

All Phase 2 works and land acquisitions have been made possible by funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government. The announcement to this effect was made in September and was welcomed with great relief from those involved with the project. The award was in recognition of the importance of the Cobham area as a major green space making a valuable contribution to the green infrastructure of Thames Gateway.

From the outset it was recognised that each element of the project has to have a sustainable and guaranteed future. Management arrangements with the respective landowners are being finalised to achieve this.

There is also a recognition that there will be always be more that can be done. For example, it has not been possible at this stage to restore the Gothic Dairy on the South Lawn of the Hall. If we didn't know it when we started, we now know that projects of this scale and importance are never ending.