

## Rescue

In 2001 the Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) provided the funding for Gravesham Borough Council to purchase, on its behalf, Cobham Wood and the Darnley Mausoleum; on the understanding that the ownership and maintenance of the property would eventually transfer to the National Trust. This proposal is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund who in 2004 awarded a grant of £4.9million for a project to restore the framework of historic Cobham Park, including Cobham Wood; the largest HLF project in south east England. A project team from the CAMS organisations and including Cobham Hall is working to complete the restoration.

In recent years with the assistance of volunteers from the local community more than 95 abandoned cars have been removed from the woods. CAMS has also secured the boundaries of the Cobham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest, severely restricting illegal access and enabling legitimate visitors to enjoy the woods in peace.



## The Future

The Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) aims to restore the wood pasture in Cobham Wood, starting in 2005. Clearing the dense undergrowth is a slow and managed process to minimise shock to the veteran trees, and a sufficient number of younger trees must be retained to provide future generations of veteran trees to support the extensive wildlife that relies on them for food and shelter. The reintroduction of grazing in the wood will help to keep the undergrowth under control in future.

An additional benefit of the landscaping works will be the restoration of the panoramic views that were a feature of these woods until recently, particularly the views to and from the Darnley Mausoleum. There will also be better access for visitors to and within the woods. The National Trust will take over the ownership of this part of Cobham Woods and manage it and the Darnley Mausoleum in perpetuity.

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### Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme

The Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) is an association of organisations working together for the management and restoration of an area of national heritage, wildlife and landscape importance, centred on the historic Cobham Park.

CAMS was formed in 1997 with initial funding from Union Railways as compensation for the effects of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which passes along the edge of the historic Cobham Park and ancient Ashenbank Wood. The seven partners in CAMS are Gravesham Borough Council, the National Trust, English Heritage, Union Railways, English Nature, Kent County Council and the Woodland Trust.

This leaflet is one of a series produced by CAMS on aspects of Cobham Park. Copies are available free of charge from CAMS or can be downloaded from the CAMS website.

For more information on the Cobham Park Heritage Project or to receive a regular free newsletter contact CAMS.



COBHAM ASHENBANK  
MANAGEMENT  
SCHEME

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# Cobham Wood

## Historic Cobham Park



COBHAM ASHENBANK  
MANAGEMENT  
SCHEME

# Cobham Wood

Cobham Wood is an internationally important area of 165 acres of former wood pasture within the boundary of historic Cobham Park. The wood is part of the much larger Cobham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest located to the west of Strood, in the parishes of Cobham and Cuxton.

*“Wood pasture is an important and rare habitat and of historic significance”*

Wood pasture is an important and rare habitat and of historic significance; some experts believe that it may be the closest type of landscape in lowland Britain to that which existed in prehistoric times. For wildlife one of the most important features of wood pasture is the mosaic pattern of different vegetation cover. Trees, often very old, are scattered across the landscape with grasses, herbaceous plants and annuals beneath; pockets of scrub provide cover for a range of plants and animals. Grazing maintains a balance between the different areas of vegetation and prevents any one species or habitat from taking over. One of the key features of wood pasture is the effect of grazing on the tree species: hornbeam, oak and beech often prosper while the varieties that grazing animals find more edible, such as ash, elm and hazel are more scarce.



## A Wood in Decline

Cobham Wood was grazed by deer and cattle until after World War II when the land fell into disuse. The then Earl of Darnley sold most of the estate and his family moved out. Following a failed property development in the 1980's the woodland passed into the hands of the Official Receiver and was left open to further deterioration and widespread vandalism.

A few characteristic remnants of the old wood pasture landscape can still be seen in the wood, including the veteran trees; some of which may be as much as 500 years old. There are numerous veteran oaks, hornbeam and field maple in the wood. Many of the larger trees near the Darnley Mausoleum are sweet chestnut, planted in the early nineteenth century while the renowned landscape designer Humphry Repton was redesigning Cobham Park. It is the large number of veteran trees, which are particularly important for wildlife such as beetles, birds and bats that earns Cobham Wood its international importance. Repton also created a 'long view' or vista across the Park through Cobham Wood to the Darnley Mausoleum and enhanced the setting of the Mausoleum. With the end of grazing the land has been overgrown by young trees, particularly quick growing sycamore, ash and silver birch, as well as impenetrable scrub and undergrowth. This growth has seriously reduced the variety of wildlife in the wood and is choking the veteran trees of light and air; in addition the bracken has provided fuel for deliberate fires that have caused severe damage. Repton's vista and the panoramic views over the surrounding countryside have also been blocked.

## Visiting Cobham Woods

The main restoration works in the woods are planned to start in 2005 and last for at least two years. As part of the works there may be occasions when heavy machinery is in use at which times for safety reasons notices will advise visitors to keep to certain routes.

Cobham Woods are crossed by a number of public footpaths, see Ordnance Survey Landranger maps 177 and 178 or Explorer 163 for details.

For details of guided walks and other events in Cobham Wood contact CAMS, Towncentric tourist information in Gravesend (01474 337600), or see local press.

From Cobham: access is by public footpath from the east end of Lodge Lane.

From Cuxton: there are several footpaths from Bush Road and Charles Drive/Poplicans Road.

From Shorne Wood Country Park: access is via the bridge at Park Pale, following the public footpath to the east of the Rochester & Cobham Park Golf Club

From Strood: access is via the Temple Wood underpass at Knights Place Recreation Ground, Albatross Avenue.

By car: parking at Shorne Wood Country Park and Knights Place Recreation Ground, Strood. Limited parking in Cobham village and Cuxton.

By public transport: There is a limited bus service from Gravesend and Meopham to Cobham and a regular service from Strood to Cuxton. The nearest rail stations are Cuxton and Sole Street.

Please note Cobham Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest is not accessible for wheelchair users. Some of the footpaths are steep and all can be muddy at times.

