

The Future

The restoration proposals for the Darnley Mausoleum include putting back the chapel floor, reinstating the outer staircase and railing of the dry moat, and repairing the pyramidal roof. The interior will be cleaned of graffiti and soot and the grandeur of the chapel restored to its former glory.



At the same time the historic parkland surrounding the mausoleum will be restored with the setting of the Mausoleum and some of Repton's key views reinstated. The reintroduction of grazing to Cobham Wood to restore its traditional wood pasture habitat will also re-open some of the panoramic views across the wider area.

Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme

The Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) was formed in 1997 with initial funding from Union Railways as compensation for the effects of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The Scheme is an association of organisations working together for the management and restoration of an area of national heritage, wildlife and landscape importance, centred on historic Cobham Park.

The seven CAMS partners are: Union Railways, Kent County Council, Gravesham Borough Council, English Heritage, English Nature, The Woodland Trust and The National 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 contact CAMS.



Contact: 01474 337530
cams@gravesham.gov.uk
www.gravesham.gov.uk/cams

COBHAM ASHENBANK
MANAGEMENT
SCHEME

CAMS, Cynet House, 132 Windmill Street,
Gravesend, Kent DA12 1BQ

Visiting the Darnley Mausoleum

Restoration work on the Darnley Mausoleum is planned to start in late 2005 and last for at least two years. The exterior of the building can be viewed from public footpaths but during works it may at times be under scaffolding; the interior is only open during organised events. For details contact CAMS. The footpaths are in excess of 1.3km (1mile) from the nearest road and are unsuitable for those with seriously impaired mobility or the visually impaired (unless guided).



The Mausoleum is situated at Ordnance Survey ref: TQ694684, see Ordnance Survey Landranger maps 177 and 178 or Explorer map 163 for details.

For details of open days and other events contact CAMS, Towncentric tourist information in Gravesend (01474 337600), or see local press.

From Cobham: public footpath from Lodge Lane to the east of the village.

From Cuxton: public footpaths from Bush Road and Charles Drive/Poplicans Road.

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

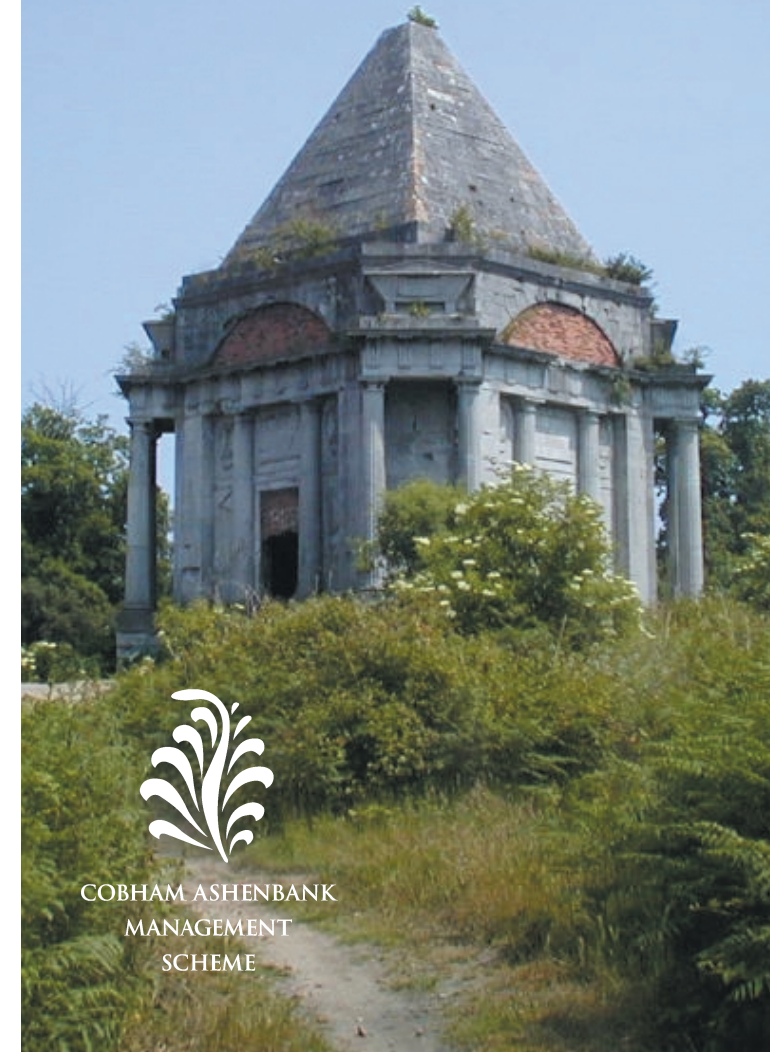
From Shorne Wood Country Park: via the bridge at Park Pale then the public footpath to the east of the Rochester & Cobham Park Golf Club.

By car: Parking at Shorne Wood Country Park and Knights Place Recreation Ground, limited parking in Cobham and Cuxton.

By public transport: Limited bus service from Gravesend and Meopham to Cobham, regular buses from Strood to Cuxton. The nearest rail stations are at Cuxton and Sole Street (near Cobham).

The Darnley Mausoleum

Historic Cobham Park



COBHAM ASHENBANK
MANAGEMENT
SCHEME



A Monument of International Importance

The Darnley Mausoleum is an internationally important monument on the English Heritage buildings at risk register. A Grade I listed building, it is one of the finest mausolea in Britain and represents a high point in the neoclassical movement in British architecture. The Mausoleum stands within Cobham Park on Williams Hill, the highest point locally, commanding wide views over the Thames and Medway Estuaries and the rolling landscape of the Kent Downs.



John Bligh, 3rd Earl of Darnley

Traditionally the Earls of Darnley had been buried in Westminster Abbey but by the later 18th century their vaults were full. John Bligh, the 3rd Earl, left instructions in his will for the construction of a mausoleum in Cobham Park where he and his descendants could be laid to rest in an appropriately grand manner. His instructions specified a square stone building with a "prominent pyramid" surrounded by a dry moat.

“...A Family Burying Place to be built on top of a hill in my park”

At the age of 19 the 3rd Earl had embarked on a Grand Tour of Italy where the ancient Roman remains were a great inspiration for wealthy travellers. In Rome the Earl would have seen the monumental pyramid of Cestius, a mausoleum built in 18bc, which may have inspired him. It has also been suggested that the inspiration was a painting by the French artist Nicholas Poussin, whose works the Earl was familiar with. Poussin's picture "The Sacrament of Ordination" features a temple remarkably similar to the Darnley Mausoleum. The Earl was an architectural enthusiast with a fashionable interest in recreating the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, including the tomb of King Mausolus (the origin of the term mausoleum) which once stood in Asia Minor but was destroyed by an earthquake in antiquity.



James Wyatt's design for the Darnley Mausoleum

James Wyatt and George Dance the Younger

After the 3rd Earl's death the prominent architect James Wyatt was commissioned by the family to design a mausoleum following the specifications set out in the Earl's will. Wyatt exhibited his design at the Royal Academy in 1783 but had a heavy workload and often left the construction of his designs to others. The Darnley Mausoleum was built under the supervision of George Dance the Younger, an important architect in his own right, and was completed in 1786 at a cost of £9000 (well over £1 million in today's prices). Wyatt and Dance probably first met in Rome when they were both following their own Grand Tours; Dance had embarked on his tour from Gravesend in 1758 at the age of 17.

A Mausoleum Without Burials

For reasons that remain unclear but may have involved a dispute with the Bishop of Rochester, the Darnley Mausoleum was not consecrated and therefore never used for burial.

Although unused the Mausoleum was nevertheless the finest and most prominent monument in Cobham Park; the pyramid was visible for some distance towering above the tops of the trees. A proposal by the renowned landscape designer Humphry Repton to convert the Mausoleum into a viewing platform was not pursued, and the building retained its sombre grandeur in a setting redesigned by Repton to provide enhanced views across the Park and estate. It remained a magnificent landscape feature and local curiosity but its condition began to gradually decline.



T. Stephens 2000

A 20th Century Conservation Cause Celebre

During the 20th century the Earls of Darnley struggled to maintain the Cobham estate. As early as 1939 an article in Country Life magazine had drawn attention to the Mausoleum's declining state of repair. In the 1950's the family moved out of Cobham Hall and sold off most of the estate, although the Darnley Mausoleum and surrounding woodland remained in the family's hands. The Mausoleum increasingly became the target of vandals, whose attacks climaxed on November 5th 1980 when a tremendous blaze in the crypt brought down the floor of the chapel, damaged and blackened much of the interior and destroyed the elegant outer staircase. The 11th Earl of Darnley who had recently inherited the title renewed attempts to find a long-term solution.

In 1985 at a hard-fought public inquiry permission was granted for a scheme to convert the Mausoleum into a palatial residence. The property was sold to a developer who became bankrupt before the scheme could be realised; the Mausoleum and surrounding woodland passed into the hands of the Official Receiver and were left open to further decay and vandalism.



The damaged interior of the Mausoleum, showing the crypt with the chapel above

Rescue

In 2001 the Cobham Ashenbank Management Scheme (CAMS) provided the funding for Gravesham Borough Council to purchase, on its behalf, the Mausoleum and the surrounding woodland for £150,000; subject to 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 the Darnley Mausoleum; 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.