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# COBHAM

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SHORT VERSION



## COBHAM VILLAGE GUIDE

The original text of this guide was written some years ago but requires only a few amendments to bring it up to date. Since it was last published the Friends of Cobham Church have been responsible for rehangng the Church Bells in 1994 in a new steel frame and recasting Bell No. 3. The Friends also installed flood lighting in 1998 and the Tower Clock was refurbished as a Village project in 1999 to mark the Millennium. Although the Millennium has passed the Church is still as strong as ever and will continue to minister to the needs of the 21st. Century people. Similarly the NEW COLLEGE is still used as sheltered accommodation - over 400 years since its foundation - and now has additional purpose built accommodation next to it at the top of STONEHOUSE YARD.

The Village lost its POST OFFICE a while ago. The POST OFFICE was later transferred to Sole Street, but this was also closed in 2008. Further up the Street the POLICE HOUSES have been converted into private dwellings. The Farm Buildings, including the old barn, at Rookery Corner have similarly been converted into private houses.

In 2005 360 acres of agricultural land between the A2 and Cobham, known as Jeskyns Farm, was purchased by the Forestry Commission and was turned into a Country Park in 2007.

## INTRODUCTION

Cobham lies to the south of Watling Street (A2) near the western end of the M2; this means that it is within easy reach of both the Medway Towns and Gravesend, as well as for those using the M25, or even coming from Essex over the Dartford Crossing. It is also served by train from London (Victoria) to Sole Street station and is only 10 minutes from Ebbsfleet International Station.

It is a rural parish of 3,061 acres, comprising a village settlement surrounded by agricultural land with isolated farmhouses, large residences in spacious grounds, dispersed hamlets, and the settlement of Sole Street. The village has connections with Cobham Hall, although the Hall itself is well to the north-east of the village.

Cobham lies on the northern slope of the chalk escarpment of the North Downs, with the village itself on a high east/west ridge overlooking the surrounding countryside.

The variety of natural vegetation within the Parish is due to deposits of brickearth with flints, Thanet Sands, Woolwich Beds and Blackheath Beds, over the underlying chalk.

The name is Anglo-Saxon. Former spellings included Cobeham, thought to be derived from Cobba, a personal name. Domesday Book omits it, although its neighbours and even two manors are listed. The earliest mention is of its church in the Chrism list of 1115 which is a copy of a much older list. In 1135 the Abbey of Bermondsey became the patron and presented the vicars until the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

The Sarsen stones to be seen throughout the village are masses of sand hardened by iron. Some were used for the Cobham megalith, and others have been built into the structure of the Church.

The people of the Bronze Age made a collection of huge Sarsen stones in Battle Street. Their arrangement is unknown and they were dispersed in 1770. Some have been built into the foundations of the church, perhaps in

accordance with the earliest Christian practice of incorporating pagan buildings into their first churches. Others were transported to Cobham Hall where they can be seen in Lady Darnley's garden.

The Romans left little mark on the Parish save that the line of their Watling Street is still its northern boundary and there are the remains of a villa in the grounds of Cobham Hall.

From the start of the thirteenth century, the history of the parish becomes closely linked with the families who owned the land, the first of these being the de Cobhams, who acquired their lands in Cobham and Shorne from the de Quartermeres during the reign of King John. For the next 400 years, they and their heirs, the Brookes, dominated the village and generously endowed the church.

As lawyers, the Brookes were connected with the Court. As soldiers they fought for the Cross in the Holy Land, and for the King in France and Britain. No doubt many men of Cobham accompanied them, but of these, there is no record.

After the Brookes, King James I gave Cobham to his cousins, the Stuarts, Dukes of Lennox and Richmond, of whom perhaps the best known is la Belle Stuart, wife of the 6th and last duke and the original Britannia on the old penny coin. The last Stuart heiress married secondly Sir Joseph Williamson, who was First Secretary under Charles II and gave Cobham some beautiful Communion silver.

In 1715 the lands passed by marriage to the Blighs, who were created Earls of Darnley in 1725, and it is this family which still has such strong associations with Cobham and some of whom continue to reside in the Parish.

## THE CHURCH

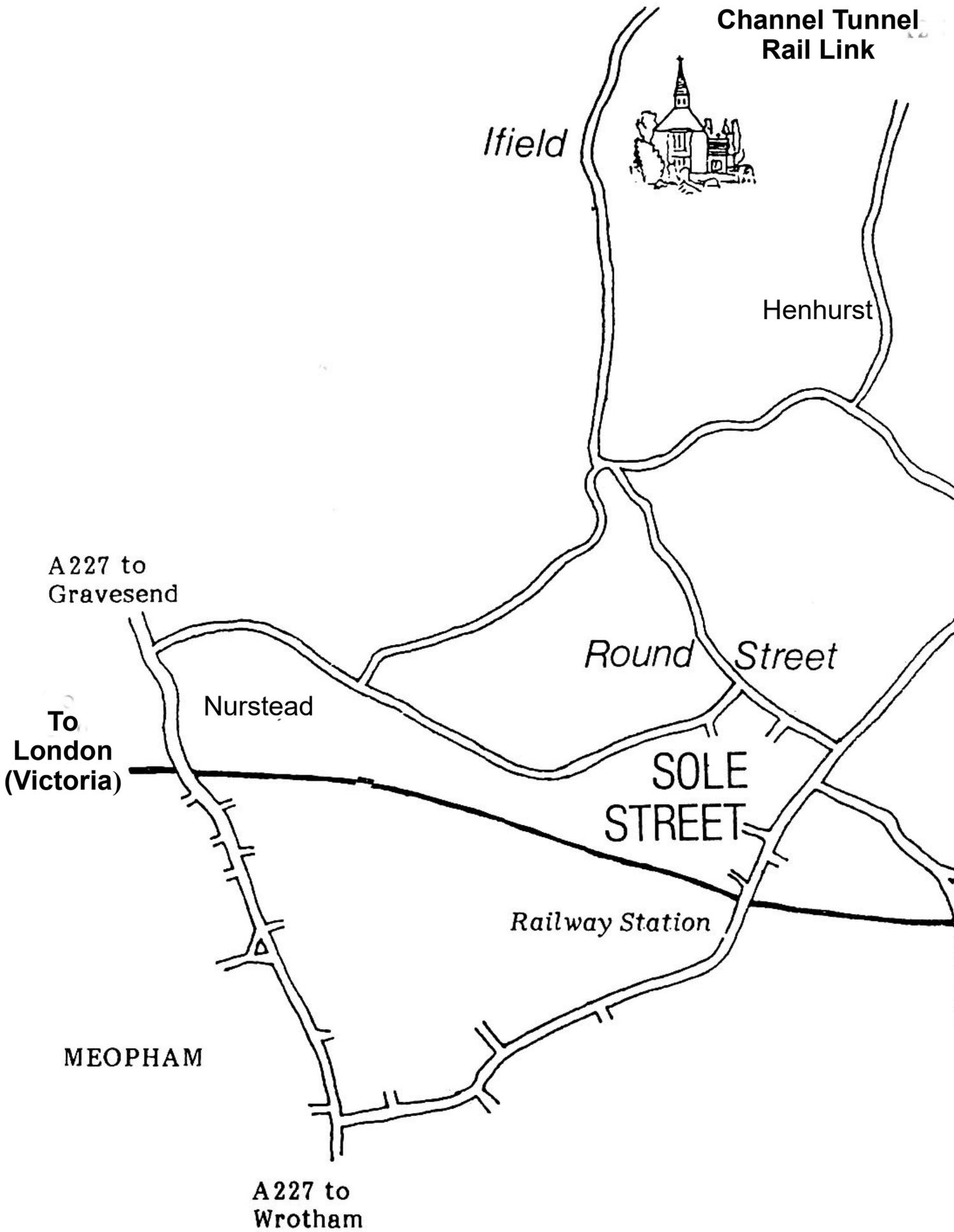
Situated on the highest point in the village the church dominates and is a great attraction to visitors.

Early in the thirteenth century the de Cobhams began to provide money for rebuilding the existing old church, although they continued to live at Cooling. Of this work only the splendid Chancel dating from 1220 survives. The de Cobhams seem to have regarded it as their own Chapel and place of burial and made it exceptionally large for a parish church - similar perhaps to the huge endowments of the Norfolk 'Wool' churches.



About 1880, when the Chancel was re-fashioned, two small fragments of an earlier church were uncovered. These can be seen in the Chancel.

The period 1360 - 70 was a time of intense building at the expense of Sir John de Cobham, 3rd Baron of Cobham, described on his brass as 'the Founder of this place'. He re-built the nave with its two aisles, raised the roof, and added the porch and parvis. He also built the College, which still stands to the south of the Church and liberally endowed the Church, presenting it with ornaments, vestments, books and plate. His last work was to add the tower, lengthening the two aisles to clasp it. It is among the finest of Kentish west towers, and it is fairly certain that he was being advised by Henry Yevele, the King's Master Mason and architect of the naves of Canterbury Cathedral and Westminster Abbey.



**A2 to Gravesend,  
Ebbsfleet and London**

**To Shorne**

**A2 to M2  
and  
Canterbury**

St. Thomas'  
Well

Ashenbank  
Wood



Owletts

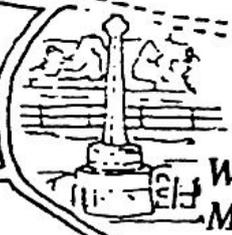
**COBHAM**



*Cobham Hall*



Church



War  
Memorial



*Mausoleum*

**To Medway Towns**

The SHIP INN, one of three public houses in the village looks like the typical Kentish country pub.

The DARNLEY ARMS dates from the eighteenth century, but its origins have yet to be fixed with certainty. One of the previous licensees of the pub was a Mr Goosey, and he really did live next door to Mr Gander!

The LEATHER BOTTLE is the Leather Bottle of Charles Dickens fame. It played an important role in *The Pickwick Papers*, and you can find more details either in that novel, or by visiting during opening hours, and studying its many exhibits

THE SCHOOL is Victorian and flint built, with modern extensions. On the site of the School House, had been the vicarage before the one at Robinswood, but the vicar complained of the noise from the windmill opposite, and so he was moved.

OWLETT'S is to the west of the village, and was built by Bonham Hayes in 1684. Belonging to the National Trust it is a good example of a seventeenth century Kentish farmhouse, which, although modified with various later additions, still retains its main features.

The MAUSOLEUM was to be the burial place for the Earls of Darnley, and was commissioned by the 4th. Earl in response to a wish of his dying father and has been renovated with a National Trust centre closeby.

Nearby and close to Sole Street station is YEOMAN'S HOUSE, beyond Manor Road. Like Owletts, this was once owned by Sir Herbert Baker who gave it to the National Trust.

COBHAM HALL GIRLS SCHOOL is situated to the north east of the parish, Cobham Hall has been a girls' public school, since 1962 though originally it was the ancestral home of the de Cobhams, Brookes, Stuarts and Darnley's.

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