

The Surrey Diggers Trail links locations in the county connected with the Diggers.

Further information about the Diggers and the Trail may be had by visiting:

Elmbridge Museum  
Church Street  
Weybridge  
Surrey  
KT13 8DE

or the Trail website at [www.diggerstrail.co.uk](http://www.diggerstrail.co.uk)

The Trail has been designed and constructed by the Elmbridge Diggers Heritage Group. The group was formed following the 350th anniversary in 1999 of the Diggers' original occupation of St George's Hill.

The following books are recommended for more detailed study of the Diggers:

David C. Taylor, *Gerrard Winstanley in Elmbridge* (revised ed., 2000)

Andrew Bradstock, ed., *Winstanley and the Diggers 1649-1999* (2000)

David Boulton, *Gerrard Winstanley and the Republic of Heaven* (2000)

Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972)

D. W. Petegorsky, *Left-Wing Democracy in the English Civil War* (revised ed., 1995)



### Other Surrey sites connected with the Diggers you may wish to visit:

#### Warreners Cottage, The Ridings, Cobham

Anthony Wren, a member of the Digger community at Little Heath, is thought to have lived in this house. It is now privately owned but may be viewed from the street.

#### Painshill Park

Henry Bickerstaffe was one of the original St George's Hill Diggers and a signatory to their first manifesto *The True Levellers Standard Advanced*. The Bickerstaffe family lived at a farm which was later incorporated into Painshill Park.

#### Mole Cottage, Church Street, Cobham

William King, father of Gerrard Winstanley's first wife Susan King, is known to have owned property in Cobham, and this house may have been his residence at some time. Scratched on some timber framing are the letters W.K. and the date 1645. It is now privately owned.

#### The Exchange, Street Cobham

Formerly known as the White Lion, it was the home of opponents of the Diggers on Little Heath. In *A Watch-Word to the City of London*, Gerrard Winstanley records that some 'Knights, Gentlemen, and rich men' came here to consume 'sack and Tobacco' and to 'gather together what course they should the diggers.'

#### Kingston-upon-Thames

Here some Diggers were briefly imprisoned.

#### West Horsley

This was the parish of Parson John Winstanley, the brother of Gerrard Winstanley. His name appears on the wall of the church.

*Please note that St George's Hill is now a private, gated estate.*

*Cobham has honoured Gerrard Winstanley by naming two roads after him.*

Project Ref: SE00021 Catalogue Ref: LH0025  
Project Title: DIGGERS HERITAGE PROJECT  
Group Name: ELMBRIDGE DIGGERS GROUP

Countryside Agency Local Heritage Initiative  
Project Outputs Archive

2 of 2

# THE SURREY DIGGERS TRAIL

Sites associated with the movement of 1649-50



[www.diggerstrail.co.uk](http://www.diggerstrail.co.uk)

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## WHO WERE THE DIGGERS?

The Digger movement began in Surrey in April 1649, two months after the execution of Charles I.

The Diggers settled on St George's Hill near Weybridge, though hostility from local landowners forced them to move to Little Heath, Cobham after a few months. By that time the movement had spread to many different parts of the country.

The Diggers' name comes from their practice of digging and manuring the 'waste' and common land, which they did both to grow food and to show that everybody has a right to enjoy the Earth and its fruits.

Diggers believed that freedom from poverty, hunger and oppression could be won if the Earth were made a 'Common Treasury for all'. They set up communal settlements and encouraged everybody to come and join them. The brutality of their opponents meant they did not survive for long, but their writings and ideas continue to inspire people throughout the world today.

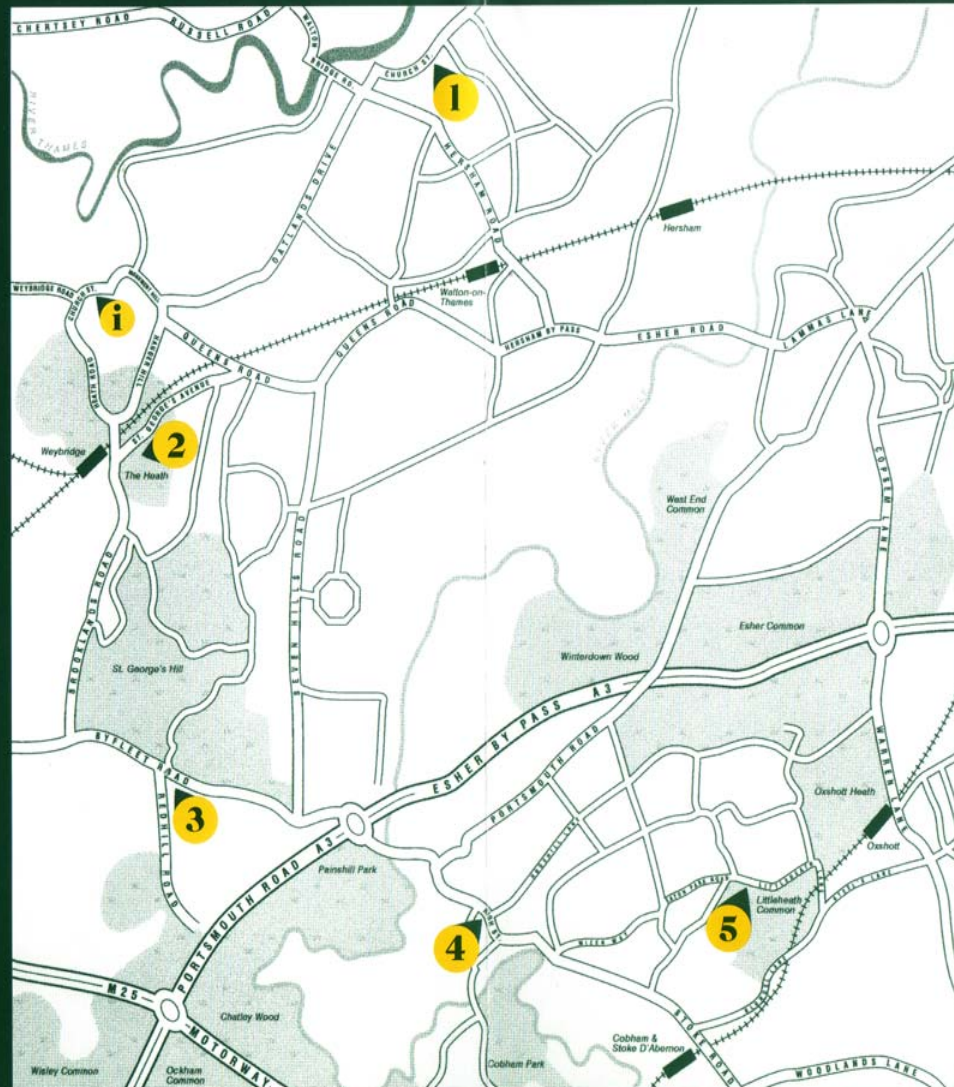
The Surrey Diggers Trail links the sites in Surrey with which they are known to have connections.



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# 1. St Mary's Church, Walton

Walton Church appears three times in the story of the Diggers.

One Sunday in April 1649 the church was invaded by a group of radical soldiers. They took over the service and announced that ministers, magistrates, tithes and the Sabbath were all abolished. At the same time the Diggers were abolishing the Sabbath in a practical way on St George's Hill by digging, planting and settling on waste land there. It is not certain that a connection between the two actions was intended, but one was soon made when a Digger from the Hill appeared in the church and 'getting up a great burden of thorns and briars thrust them into the pulpit to stop out the Parson'.

The Diggers attracted opposition from local landowners. The lord of the manor, Francis Drake, organised attacks on them and their crops and animals. Following one attack, some Diggers were arrested and imprisoned in the church where they were beaten up by the 'rude multitude'. A magistrate later released them without charge. Further assaults on the Diggers followed, and after another incident five of their number were arrested and imprisoned in the church. This time they were transferred to prison in Kingston before being released.

Although parts have been restored and rebuilt, St Mary's Church is substantially as the Diggers would have known it in 1649.

*True Religion, and undefiled, is this,  
To make restitution of the Earth, which  
hath been taken and held from the  
Common people...and so set the  
oppressed free.*

Gerrard Winstanley,  
*A New-years Gift for the Parliament  
and Armie (1650)*

# 2. Cobbetts Hill (opposite Weybridge Station)

The stone on this site was carved by Andrew Whittle to celebrate the 350th anniversary in 1999 of the beginning of the Diggers' enterprise in this area and the work of their great pamphleteer, Gerrard Winstanley.

Its siting here was made possible by funding from the Elmbridge Borough Council Millennium Fund, and it was unveiled by the Mayor of Elmbridge, Cllr Alan Hopkins, on 10th December 2000.

*...my mind was not at rest, because nothing was acted, and thoughts run in me, that words and writings were all nothing and must die, for action is the life of all, and if thou dost not act, thou dost nothing. Within a little time...I tooke my spade and went and broke the ground upon George-hill in Surrey, thereby declaring freedom to the Creation, and that the earth must be set free from intanglements of Lords and Landlords, and that it shall become a common Treasury for all...*

Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-Word to the City of London and the Armie (August 1649)*



# 3. St George's Hill

The Diggers first broke the ground on St George's Hill on 1st April 1649 as they set out to make the earth 'a common treasury for all'. The Hill is the place usually associated with their project and ideas, and it is from here that their influence and the practice of Digging, spread to many parts of England.

The actual site of their Digging is thought to have been on the lower, southern slopes of the Hill. One contemporary account describes it as being 'next to Campe Close', which probably corresponds to the Camp End Road of today. The Diggers hoped that many would join them in their work, and for months their activity was one of the biggest news stories of the day - 'the talk of the whole Land' as one of their letters put it. It was from St George's Hill that they issued their famous manifesto, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* in April 1649.

As the Diggers' influence increased, so did the hostility of local landowners. Prominent among these was the lord of the manor, Francis Drake. With two violent accomplices, John Taylor and William Starr, Drake organised gangs to attack the Diggers and destroy their houses, crops and animals. Drake hoped that the Army would help him to suppress the Diggers but after visiting their settlement General Fairfax concluded they were doing no harm.

Following a court case against the Diggers - at which they were forbidden to speak in their own defence - and further attacks, they abandoned St George's Hill in August 1649. They established a new settlement at Little Heath, near Cobham, where they were active until finally evicted at Easter 1650.

*Take notice, That England is not a  
Free People, till the Poor that have  
no Land, have a free allowance to  
dig and labour the Commons, and  
so live as Comfortably as the  
Landlords that live in their  
Inclosures.*

*The True Levellers Standard  
Advanced (April 1649)*



## 4. Cobham Centre

Many of the Diggers were residents of Cobham, including Gerrard Winstanley. One, Anthony Wren, probably lived in a cottage which still stands in The Ridings. Winstanley, the Diggers' main spokesperson, moved to Cobham from London with his wife Susan King in 1643. After the Diggers were evicted from St George's Hill in August 1649 they continued their project to make the earth a 'common treasury for all' on the Little Heath at Cobham.

Some of the people most opposed to the Digging on Little Heath were also connected with Cobham, including Parson John Platt, the lord of the manor, and his opposite number at Stoke d'Abernon, Sir Anthony Vincent. Platt was the Diggers' most active opponent, though other ministers in Surrey appointed a 'Lecturer' or special preacher at Cobham to stir up opposition to the Diggers. The White Lion in Street Cobham – which is still standing though no longer known by that name – was once the venue for a meeting of those hostile to the Diggers. But the Diggers had considerable support from the people of Cobham, and it was not until Easter 1650 that inducements and threats eventually persuaded a sufficient number of them to assist the gentry in dispersing the Diggers' camp.

Winstanley spent much of his later life in Cobham and held positions of responsibility in the town and church. The origins of his connections with Cobham are unclear, though his father-in-law William King at one time owned property in the town. This might have been Mole Cottage, a seventeenth-century house still standing in Church Street.

*...every one talks of freedom, but there are but few that act for freedom, and the actors for freedom are oppressed by the talkers and verball professors of freedom; if thou wouldst know what true freedom is...thou shalt see it lies in the community in spirit, and community in the earthly treasury...*

Gerrard Winstanley, *A Watch-Word to the City of London and the Armie* (August 1649)



*Design by Max Doig based on work undertaken with pupils at Heathside School, Weybridge, and Bell Farm Junior School, Hersham. Funded by the R. C. Sherriff Rosebriars Trust. This design appears as a mosaic in the pedestrianized precinct, Cobham.*



*The memorial stone at Cobbeys Hill*

## 5. Little Heath

The Diggers are usually remembered for their action on St George's Hill, but after being violently evicted from there they wrote:

*In Cobham on the little Heath our digging there goes on.*

*And all our friends they live in love, as if they were but one.*

Here they enjoyed more success: eleven acres were cultivated, six houses built, winter crops harvested, and several influential pamphlets published. Their numbers also increased, and among those

whose names first appear at his time are Anthony Wren and the noted London poet Robert Coster.

If the Diggers hoped for less hostility here than at St George's Hill they were disappointed. Parson John Platt, lord of the manor of Cobham, after professing sympathy with them became their chief enemy. He organised gangs to attack the Diggers and their crops and houses. He also used his power as landlord to prevent local people from supporting them.

When the pressure became intense early in 1650 two Diggers set out from here to visit other communities in the south and midlands to appeal for support and funds. They eventually reached Wellingborough where they were arrested. In April Parson Platt and other landowners finally drove the Diggers from Little Heath.

*... you may joyn with us in this Work, and so find Peace. Or else, if you do oppose us, we have peace in our Work, and in declaring this Report: And you shall be left without excuse.*

*The True Levellers Standard Advanced* (April 1649)

*And here I end, having put my Arm as far as my strength will go to advance Righteousness: I have Writ, I have Acted, I have Peace: and now I must wait to see the Spirit do his own work in the hearts of others, and whether England shall be the first Land, or some other, wherein Truth shall sit down in triumph.*

Gerrard Winstanley,  
*A Next-yeers Gift for the Parliament and Armie* (1650)