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:

Embridge Museum
Church Street
Weybridge
Surrey
KT13 6DE

or the Trail website at www.diggertrail.co.uk

The Trail has been designed and constructed by the Embridge 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:


Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down (1972)


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

Warriners 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 Gerard 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 is one of the last buildings in Cobham to survive from the period of the Digger occupation. The name was once used by the Diggers to express their desire to live in a peaceful community where ‘bread and drink are shared.’

Kingston-upon-Thames
Here some Diggers were briefly in residence.

West Horsley
This was the parish of Parson John’s manor of Cobham. His name appears on the records of the church.

Please note that St George’s is now a private, gated estate.

Cobham has honoured Gerard by naming two roads after him.

www.diggertrail.co.uk
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.diggertrail.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:


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


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**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.R. and the date 1645. It is now privately owned.

**The Exchange, Street Cobham**

Formerly known as the White Lion, it was one of the inns of opponents of the Diggers on Lit A Watch-Word to the City of London. Gerrard Winstanley records that some Knights, Gentlemen, and others here to consume 'beer and tobacco together what course they should the diggers.'

**Kingston-upon-Thames**

Here some Diggers were briefly in residence.

**West Hoathly**

This was the parish of Parson John manor of Cobham. His name app. ministers on the wall of the church.

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

Cobham has honoured Gerrard by naming two roads after him.

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www.diggertrail.co.uk
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.
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, magistrate, tithe 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 the Parnon.

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
has been taken and held from the
Common people... and so set the
oppressed free.

Gerhard Winstanley,
A New-yeares Gift for the Parliament
and Armine (1650)

2. Cobbetts Hill
(opposite Weybridge Station)

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

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

...my mind was not at rest, because nothing was
acted, and thoughts ran 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 took 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
appropriations of Lords and Landlords, and that it
shall become a common Treasure for all...

Gerhard Winstanley, A Watch-Ward to the City of
London and the Armine (August 1649)

3. St George’s Hill

The Diggers first broke the ground on St George’s Hill on 16
April 1649 as they set out to make the earth a common
treasure 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 Diggering, spread to many parts of England.

The actual site of their Diggering is thought to have been on the
lower, southern slopes of the Hill. One contemporary
account describes it as being ‘next to Camps 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 letter
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, the
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 Poore that have
no Land, have a free allowance
to dig and labour the Comons, and
so live as Comfortably as the
Landlords that live in their
Inclusions.

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 Digger's 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 Strood 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 verbal professors of freedom; if those would know what true freedom is they shall 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)

5. Little Heath

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

In Cobham on the Little Heath our digging there goes on.
And all our friends they live in fear, 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 jigs to attack the Diggers and their crops and houses. He also used his power as landlord to prevent local people from supporting them.

While 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 join 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 Advancement (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 New-year's Gift for the Parliament and Armie (1651)