

Guildford

Distance: 0.9 miles / 1.5 km leisurely walking

In Pursuit of Spring: Chapter 2 The Start: London to Guildford

Refreshments: Multiple pubs and eating places

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford & Farnham)

Getting there:

If driving, suggested car parks – Portsmouth Road Car Park: 17 Park St, Guildford GU1 4XB or Castle Car Park: Sydenham Rd, Guildford GU1 3RW or Millbrook Car Park: 30 Millbrook Rd GU1 3XJ.

To avoid the Wey and reach Guildford, which is mainly on this side of the water, I had to turn sharp to the right at Shalford, and to penetrate, along with the river, the hills which I had been following. Within half a mile of Guildford I was at the point where the Pilgrim's Way, travelling the flank of these hills, descends towards the Wey and the Hog's Back opposite. A small but distinct hill, with a precipitous, sandy face, rises sheer out of the far side of the river where the road once crossed. The silver-gray square of the ruins of St. Catherine's Chapel tops the cliff. The river presently came close to my bank; the road climbed to avoid it, and brought me into Guildford by Quarry Road, well above the steep-built, old portion of the town and its church and rookery sycamores, though below the castle... I had thought not to decide for or against going on to Farnham that night until I had drunk tea. But having once sat in a room—not of the "Jolly Butcher," but a commercial temperance hotel—where I could only hear the rain falling from the sky and dripping from roofs, I glided into the resolution to spend the night there. A fire was lit; the servant stood a poker vertically against the grate to make it burn; and, after some misgivings, it did burn. The moon was mounting the clear east, and Venus stood with Orion in the west above a low, horizontal ledge of darkest after sunset cloud. There could not have been a better time for those ten miles to Farnham; but I did not go.

Guildford's name indicates the settlement was built around an important River Wey crossing by the Harrow Way through a gap in the North Downs; why *gilden* or *golden* is mooted. Bronze Age and Roman artefacts have been found here, though it was in Saxon times that it became a recognizable town and may have been a defensive *burgh* against the Danes. It held a royal mint from 978 until the Conqueror's reign. The tower of the 10th century St Mary's Church is a Saxon survival.

The Normans constructed a wooden castle on a motte and bailey overlooking the town and crossing; it was later reconstructed in stone.

Its 1257 charter gave it the right to a market and fair, as well as a measure of town governance and from 1295 it was represented in Parliament. It was a fulling town for the wool trade, but was outshone by nearby London as a trading centre.

The Dominican friary and hospital were early foundations but were suppressed in the Reformation. A grammar school was built in 1507 and in 1619 George Abbot (1562 – 1633), Archbishop of Canterbury, built almshouses (Abbot's Hospital) and a cloth hall.

The town grew rapidly in the 19th century. The Corn Exchange was built in 1818 and gas for street lighting came three years later. Electricity replaced it in 1891. The railway arrived in 1845 and strengthened the town's links with London and regional towns. The new Borough of 1836 did much to develop the town. A new hospital was built in 1866. In 1888 the town bought the castle grounds and created a public park in Queen Victoria's honour. In 1683 a new Guildhall was built in the High St. Brewing, engineering and printing became well established. The Dennis brothers 1895 bicycle-making concern grew by 1901 into the first car factory and later built public vehicles.

The 1911 census shows a population of 51,539. The town expanded in the 20th century with council housing developments such as Merrow Park, shopping centres and improved civic amenities. A cathedral was consecrated in 1961 for the new diocese, created in 1927 out of Winchester Diocese. Shortly afterwards the University of Surrey as well as Guildford School of Art were established.

1. Walk to the pedestrianized High St and the Guildhall with its tower and overhanging clock.



High St: Guildhall, Hugh Thompson, 1909

2. Go through Tunsgate, opposite the Guildhall and walk up the Tunsgate street to the junction with Castle St.

3. Cross to the March Hare pub. By the gateway to its right, enter the Castle Grounds.



1. A former courtroom and originating in the 14th century, this building was extended and became a Council Chamber in 1683 when its façade was reconstructed and its iconic clock set up.

Thomas describes the High St on a wet March day: *The closed shops, plate glass, and granite roadway of the High Street put the worst possible appearance on the rain that suddenly poured down at six. A motor car dashed under the “Lion” arch for shelter. The shop doorways were filled by foot-passengers. The plate glass, the granite, and the rain rebounding from it and rushing in two torrents down the steep gutters, made a scene of physical and spiritual chill under a sky that had now lost even the pretence to possess a sun.*

Saxon Guildford may have originally moved from along Quarry St to the current High St and was protected by a bank and ditch which also enclosed the ford. Passageways (known as gates) ran between the building plots to the ditch; some – such as Tunsgate – are still in use today.

The March Hare is one of the many references to the association of Lewis Carroll with the town.

The town’s porticoed war memorial lies ahead with the bowling green. On either side of the green and beyond the war memorial statue (for conflicts after WWII) are some steps up and a path signed down to Jeanne Argent’s sculpture of Alice through the Looking Glass.

Thomas gives the outline of an evening walk he undertook: *Not until after supper did I go out to look at the night I had lost, the cold sea of sky, the large bright moon, the white stars over the shimmering roofs, and the yellow street lamps and window panes of Guildford. I walked haphazard, now to the right, now to the left, often by narrow passages and dark entries. I skirted*

the railings of the gardens which have been made out of the castle site, the square ivy-patched keep, the dry moat full of sycamores; and hereby was a kissing corner.



Lewis Carroll

- 4. Returning to face the front of the porticoed War Memorial, go down the steps to the right and cross the path, going through the gate opposite into the precinct of the Keep.**
- 5. Walk up to the Keep's entrance and follow the path round, going down the steps and walkway.**
- 6. Walk right and continue down a further flight of steps and right along the now lilled moat. Turn left and pass the ruined domestic buildings on the right.**
- 7. Go through the archway and gate onto the street.**

The castle dates from William the Conqueror's reign. It was a motte and bailey design and the bailey eventually stretched to the present Quarry St. The keep is 70 feet high, roughly 42 feet square and was originally of four storeys and contained a chapel for the garrison. The variegated and irregular exterior results from the building materials of chalk, flint, ragstone and sandstone. It is open to the public from March to October and a small admission fee is charged. It has a model of the original castle as well as interpretation panels. The roof's visitor platform affords all-round views of the town and countryside.

Guildford Castle was Surrey's only royal castle and the adjacent ruins are believed to be the remains of the King's Great Chamber, which would have had chapels and accommodation nearby.

Castle Cliffe Gardens lie ahead. Nearby, at 3 Castle St, is The Chestnuts. In 1868 the Rev Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, came to Guildford in search of a home for his recently-bereaved family of six sisters. He bought this new brick-built three-bayed house and would visit the family here from his home in Christchurch College, Oxford. They lived here till 1919 and the last Miss Dodgson died in Guildford in 1930. It was also Carroll's home in his later years and here he wrote *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in 1871 and, inspired during a walk over the Hog's Back, *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1874. An inscription on the gatepost states that he died here on 14 January, 1898. He is buried in The Mount Cemetery.

8. Continue downhill and walk through the 13th century Castle Arch, turning right into Quarry St.



St Mary's in Quarry St, 1909 Hugh Thompson

9. Turn left down Mill Lane which runs below St Mary's Church. At the end go to the left and cross Millbrook via the pedestrian crossing



Mill Mead and Mill

10. Follow the brick-paved lane to the left of the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre to Millmead Docks and cross the two footbridges over the Wey Navigation to Millmead and the Britannia pub.



Castle Arch and Guildford Museum, 1909 Hugh Thompson

Attached to the arch with a front on to Quarry St is Guildford Museum. It is a timber-framed brick and tile-hung 17th century building with later additions. It was built for the Carter family who had bought the castle in the hopes of transforming it into a house. It became the home of the Surrey Archaeological Society in 1898. It houses collections of archaeology, local history, needlework and art. It is open to the public with free admission.

The street's name derives from ancient quarries which were mined for clunch, the chalk stone, used to construct the castle and other buildings. It runs below the castle's west wall and has listed buildings varied in age and usage, many of them refronted in the 18th century.

Further down and on the left is the 10th century Saxon St Mary's Church, the town's oldest building, thought to date back to about 600 AD. Saxon buildings were usually made of wood so this stone tower of that period is rare. The church was cruciform and most of today's structure dates from the 1180s. It is built on a slope and accordingly has three interior levels. The chancel apse was demolished in 1825 to allow the widening of Quarry St. Restoration took place in 1862. The Lewis Carroll, in his role as an ordained clergyman, occasionally preached in this church which also held his funeral service.



Mill Studio, The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

11. Walk right, along the Wey towards the White House

Kelly's 1913 Directory of Surrey shows four temperance-related establishments in Guildford. One was associated with the Guildford Institute and stood on the corner of North St and Ward St (now a bank); another stood at 10 North St, close to the top of the High St. A third stood in Portsmouth Rd and a fourth was at 62 Quarry St, run by John West. Thomas says he cycled *into Guildford by Quarry Road* (I can find no reference to it being named other than 'Street'). My guess, given the description of his town ramble, is that Thomas stayed here in the *commercial temperance hotel*.

12. Walk towards St Nicolas Church on the left.

This is Thomas's route: *I crossed Quarry Road and went down Mill Lane to the "Miller's Arms," the water-works, and the doubled Wey roaring in turbid streams. A footbridge took me to Mill Mead, the "Britannia," and the faintly nautical cottages that look, over a gas-lit paved space, at the river and the timber sheds of the other bank. The dark water, the dark houses, the silvered, wet, moonlit streets, called for some warm, musical life in contrast. But except that a sacred concert was proceeding near the market place, there was nothing like it accessible. Many couples hurried along: at corners here and there a young man, or two young men, talked to a girl. The inns were not full, too many travellers having been discouraged.*



St Nicholas Church and High St

13. Turn right and cross the bridge.

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre lies ahead. Guildford had a theatre in 1789. The present theatre was named after French concert pianist turned actress Yvonne Arnaud (1890 – 1958), a resident of Guildford.

14. Go over the pedestrian crossing and walk up High St.

The River Wey navigation, connecting Weybridge and Guildford, was opened in 1653. Connected to Godalming in 1764, it closed as a commercial concern in 1983.

15. Cross over Quarry St and continue forward.

A sculpture of Alice and the March hare by sculptor Edwin Russell adorns the lawn.

16. Walk to the High St and the end of the town walk.



This is one of the town's oldest churches. John Mason Neale (1818 – 1866), composer of *Good King Wenceslaus*, was a deacon here. Hymnologist John Monsell was a rector here from 1870. He was author of *Fight the good fight* and *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*. Falling from a boulder while inspecting the reconstruction of the church, he developed a septic wound from which he died in 1875. His memorial is set up in the raised bed above the pavement. Born in Guildford, author P.G. Wodehouse (1881 – 1975) was baptised here.



Temperance Hotel, 62 Quarry St (lighter building)

Plaques state that it was opened in 1902, replacing a stone one destroyed in a 1900 flood and was reconstructed in 1985, incorporating pre-existing materials.

Lion Walk is on the left, an echo of the sheltering arch of the former inn mentioned by Thomas.



The road west to the Hogs Back and Farnham

On the left is the Angel and Posting House and opposite this is a redbrick three-storeyed Livery Stables with two central blanked window spaces. This was Edward Thomas's *Jolly Butcher*.

At the end of the day he describes his evening in his Guildford lodgings:

I had the temperance commercial hotel to myself, but for two men who had walked from London and had no conversation left in them, as was my case also. I dallied alternately with my maps and with the pictures on the wall. One of these I liked, a big square gloomy canvas, where a dark huntsman of Byron's time, red-coated and

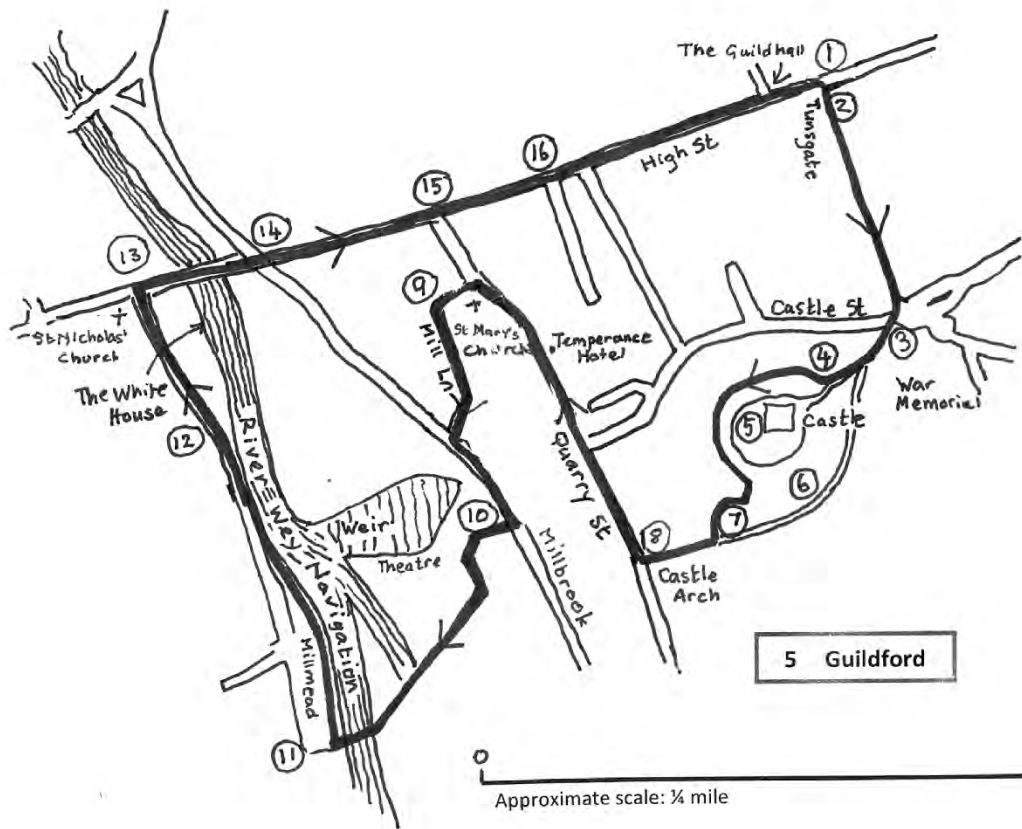
clean-shaven, turned round on his horse to cheer the hounds, one of them almost level with him, glinting pallid through the mist of time, two others just pushing their noses into the picture; it had a background of a dim range of hills and a spire. The whole picture was as dim as memory, but more powerful to recall the nameless artist and nameless huntsman than that cross at Leatherhead.

And the following morning. Thomas says, Cocks crowing and wheels thundering on granite waked me at Guildford soon after six. I was out at seven, after paying 3s. 6d. for supper and bed: breakfast I was to have at Farnham. I have often fared as well as I did that night at a smaller cost, and worse at a larger. At Guildford itself, for example, I went recently into a place of no historic interest or natural beauty, and greenly consented to pay 3s. for a bed, although the woman, in answer to my question, said that the charge for supper and breakfast would be according to what I had. What I had for supper was two herrings and bread and butter, and a cup of coffee afterwards; for breakfast I had bacon and bread and tea. The supper cost 1s. 6d., exclusive of the coffee; the breakfast cost 1s. 6d. exclusive of the tea. Nor did these charges prevent the boots, who had not cleaned my boots, from hanging round me at parting, as if I had been his long-lost son.

The beautiful, still, pale morning was as yet clouded by the lightest of white silk streamers. The slates glimmered with yesterday's rain in the rising sun. It was too fine, too still, too sunny, but the castle jackdaws rejoiced in it, crying loudly in the sycamores, on the old walls, or high in air.

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5 Guildford

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Approximate scale: 1/4 mile