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## Guildford Station to the Church-on-the-Hill Albury, Merrow and Pewley Downs, Chantries

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Distance: 15 km=9 miles                      easy walking with some modest gradients

Region: Surrey

Date written: 3-feb-2018

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Refreshments: Guildford, Newlands Corner

Map: Explorer 145 (Guildford) *but the maps in this guide should be sufficient*

*Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: [feedback@fancyfreewalks.org](mailto:feedback@fancyfreewalks.org)*

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*Country town, river, woodland, views*

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### In Brief

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This is a circular walk with views and many surprises, with easy access by rail. Almost at once, you are walking beside the peaceful River Wey before venturing along the North Downs Way up into the hills. The greatest surprise to newcomers is St Martha's Church-On-The-Hill at the highest point on the Downs where the great views begin (into eight counties, it's said). Lovers of woodland are rewarded on both sides of that great beauty spot, Newlands Corner, where you can stop for refreshments. The return leg is over two more Downs: Merrow with views to the north and Pewley with a sudden wonderful view to the south.



This walk is just as good if you come *by car (or bus)*. There are several free car parks along the route and, although the walk goes through Guildford Centre, this has the advantage of so many places to eat and drink, the Castle, lovely parks, the Old Town and a fine river walk direct from the pedestrianised High Street.

The second part of this walk is the final leg of the 16- or 18½-mile *North Downs Monster*, a Dorking-Guildford trek using the *Box Hill Via Dorking Stations* walk at the eastern end (both on this website).



There are no nettles or brambles to speak of on this walk and the paths are generally wide and well-made. In short stretches of woodland there are some muddy patches which might be irksome in a wet winter but, apart from that, sensible walking shoes should be adequate. Your dog can certainly come on this adventure and he will enjoy the company of many others of every breed.



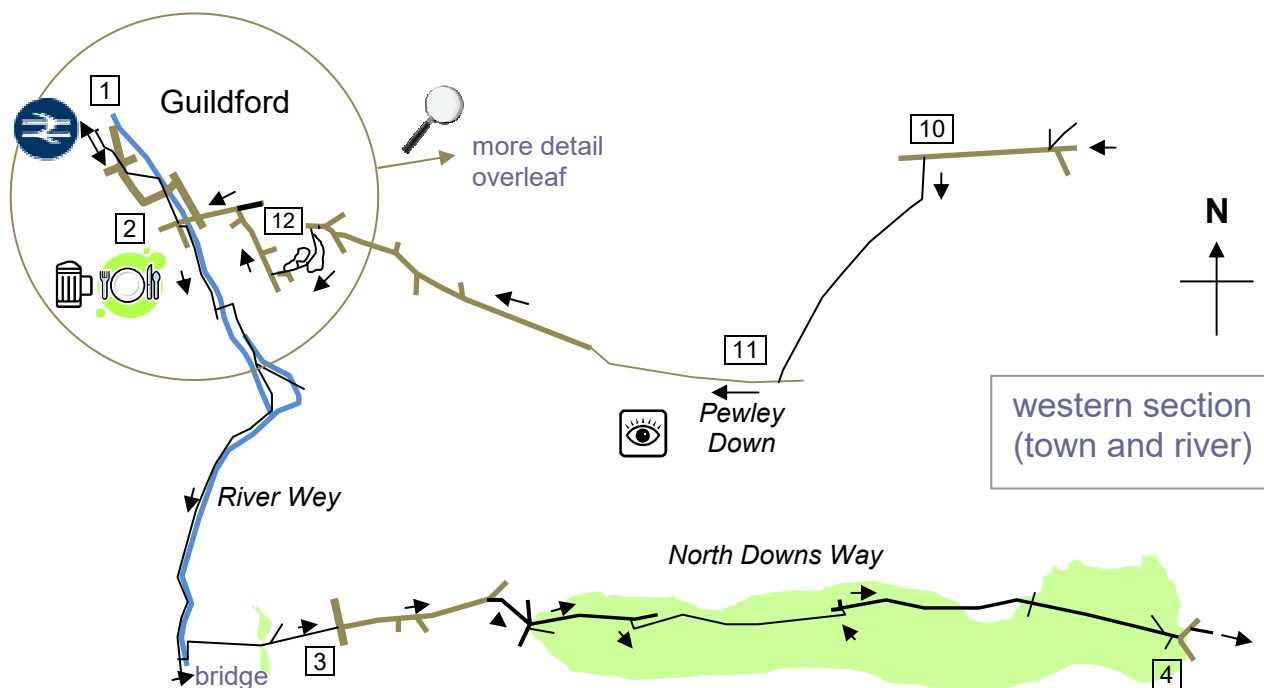
The walk begins at **Guildford Railway Station**, with regular service from London Waterloo, or from the Newlands Corner car park (postcode **GU4 8SE** grid ref 042492), no parking charge, (start section **7**), or alternatives. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

## The Walk

*“King Arthur...departed towards Winchester...and lodged in a town called Astolat, that is now in English called **Gilford**.”<sup>1</sup> This “golden ford” (named from its sunlike flowers or its yellow sand) which King Arthur and Sir Lancelot must have traversed was a vital crossing on the Pilgrims Way. The poet Tennyson tells in rhyme of Elaine of Astolat (or Astolat), the “Lady of Shallot”, who grew half-sick of shadows in her tower and took to the river, sailing tragically towards Camelot.*

*In the 900s the Saxon village of Guildford became a small town, fortified for protection against the Danes, living from the wool trade. It was the centre of the Royal Mint until the Norman Conquest, after which it was granted an annual fair. The River Wey Navigation (which you see on this walk) and the Basingstoke Canal (see two Hampshire walks in this series) made the town a vital centre on the transport network during the 1700s. The Chilworth Gunpowder Works (seen on another walk) made it an industrial centre too. In the early 1800s, on the 5<sup>th</sup> November each year, the people of Guildford were shaken by the “Guy Riots”. These violent law-breakers removed wooden fences and anything they could lay their hands on and burned them on huge bonfires. Thus fired up, they vented their anger with violent attacks on anyone caught in their wake, including the pitifully small police force. Present-day Guildford is a total contrast, a commuter borough listed among the most desirable places to live in the UK.*

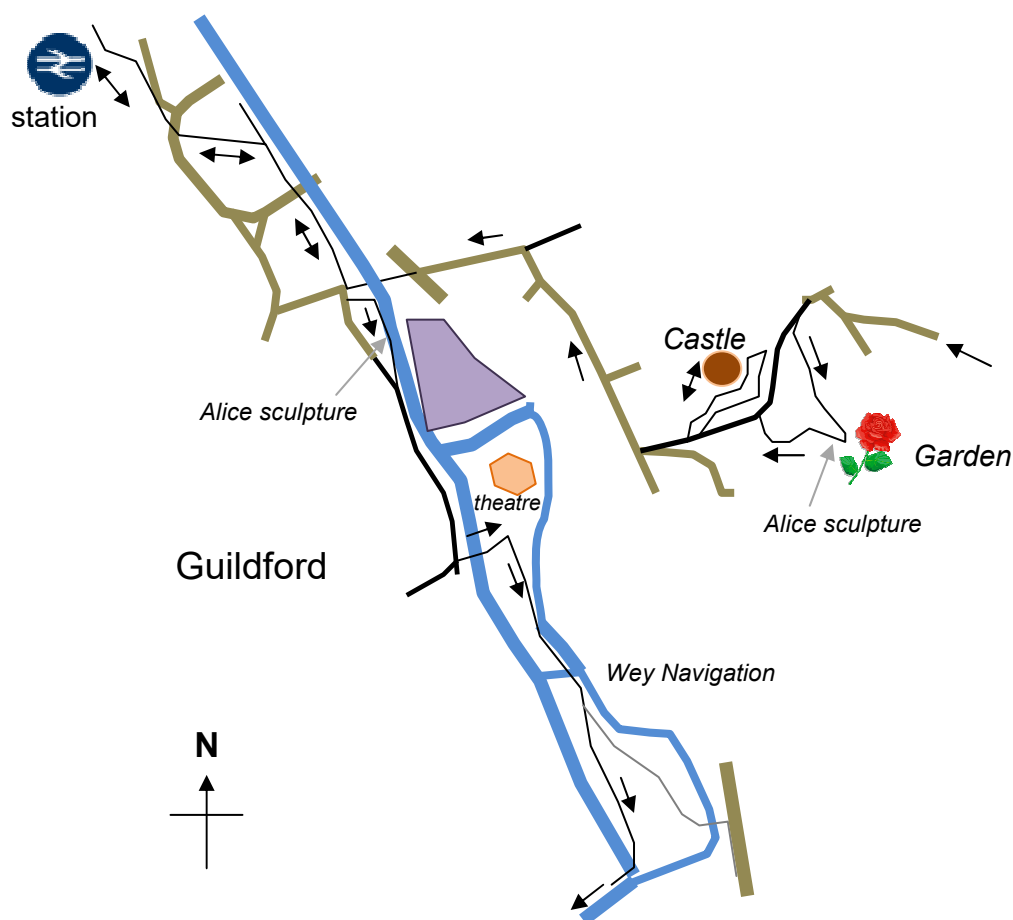
*The modern Guildford Cathedral was not a restoration but a completely new gift to the town, as Guildford had previously lain within the diocese of Winchester. (At the time of its consecration in 1961 it was much criticised as looking like a “bacon factory”.) However, Guildford is not a city. Nor is it the county town of Surrey as that honour is still held by Kingston-Upon-Thames, despite its being located now in Greater London.*



<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Mallory *Le Morte Darthur* (1485), Book XVIII Chaps viii & ix

- 1 Come out from Guildford Railway Station to the taxi rank and turn **right**. Follow the wide footway as it curves left close to the road and go down the underpass straight ahead, going through a tunnel under the road. Turn **left** and go up steps, taking you to the footway on other side of the main road. Keep dead straight on, on a path between two brand new redbrick buildings. The path leads diagonally down more step to the banks of the River Wey. Turn **right** along the riverside path, going under a main road, passing a car park on your right and reaching another road with the pedestrianised Town Bridge on your left. Staying on the same side of the river, cross straight over towards the *White House* pub. Turn **left** immediately before the pub and **right** along the riverside.

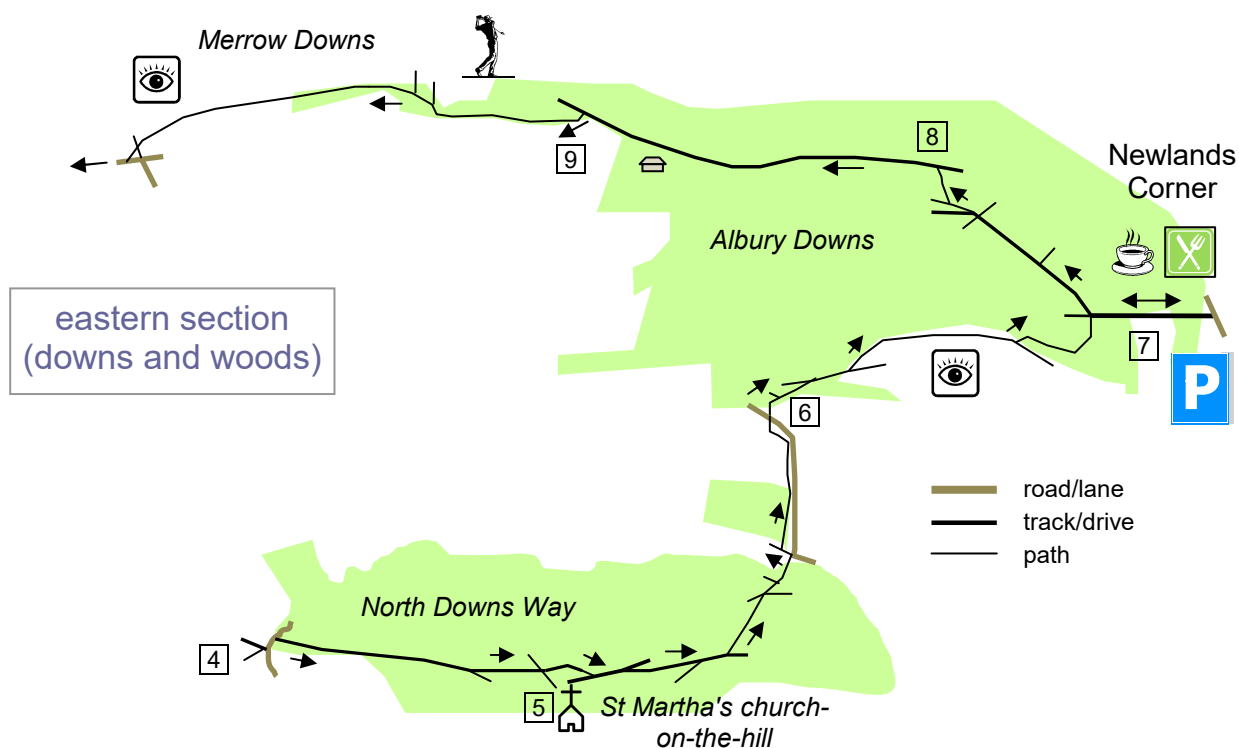
*Just to your right, over the grass, is one of the several "Alice" sculptures you will find around Guildford. Lewis Carroll stayed here with his sister out of Oxford term time and he is buried here. This one, "Down the Rabbit Hole", shows the scene from the start of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland".*




- 2 Continue along the riverside with the rather unedifying edifice of Debenhams on your left, later the rounded exterior of the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre. There is a car park on your right as you approach a small steel bridge. Turn **left** across the bridge over the river and turn **sharp right** along the towpath, with the Millmead Lock on your left. [Jul 2020: the path was cordoned off for work on the river bank just ahead. Walkers diverted to the main road as far as the boathouse, crossing a bridge back to the towpath.] You are walking between the Wey Navigation on your left and the river itself on your right. You come over a sluice. Immediately after, opposite the Guildford Boathouse, fork **right** on a narrow surfaced path. Your path turns right, over another sluice, and you are now following the right bank of the main river/canal. After 700m of gentle tree-lined meandering, you come to a

junction on your right where the North Downs Way (NDW) joins the route, by a little stone bridge and stone seat. From this point, as far as Newlands Corner, you will be following the route of the NDW. Continue along the riverside for another 50m to the footbridge. Cross the bridge, turn **left** on the other bank (doubling back) for 40m and, at a signpost turn **right** away from the river. This extensive natural space is part of the Shalford Water Meadows. Your path goes over a small bridge and through a band of trees by some wooden gates. Go straight across the grass, heading for the main road and a large wooden gate and fingerpost, visible just to the right of some pine trees.

- 3 Cross the road, using an island on your left, and go straight over onto a residential road, Pilgrims Way. In 400m, the road curves slightly left. Fork **right** here on a driveway by a fingerpost indicating the NDW, past a sign for Chantry Wood, passing the Chantries Car Park on your left (alternative start). You come to a complex junction by a fingerpost. Go straight ahead, just to the **left** of a small white cottage. (The Chantries nature reserve and leisure area is to the right of the cottage: it is explored in another walk in this series "Chantries, Shalford, Blackheath"; you can navigate your way through it instead of following the text, relying on a sense of direction.) Follow this wide surfaced drive for just over 250m to find a large wooden gate on your right. Turn **right** here by a *no horses* sign and immediately **left** on a narrow path running parallel to the drive you were on. (This path is a much more attractive option, although you can of course stay on the drive.) Follow this winding path, never straying too far from the drive on your left. After ½ km or so, you see the surfaced drive bending away left into a farm. Here you need to shift back onto the original route, keeping the unchanged direction on a wide dirt woodland track. In 200m, the track breaks the cover of trees and runs between meadows. As you re-enter trees go over a crossing path and continue straight ahead through woodland. The path rises and dips, getting steeper for 400m to join a bridleway coming from your left at a fingerpost and shortly a wide track joining from the right. Immediately after, your track ends at a narrow tarmac lane.



- 4 Turn **left** on the lane for only 30m, then **right** on a footpath uphill. Your path runs beside a tall wooden fence on your right and passes a car park on your left (alternative start). It leads past a wooden barrier onto a wide sandy path with the thatched *St Martha's Priory* on your right and an open wide grass strip on your left. A footpath joins from the left as you enter deeper forest on a rising path. At a fingerpost, keep straight ahead uphill, ignoring a bridleway that forks right. You arrive thankfully at a crossing track just before the Church of St Martha-on-the-hill.

 *St Martha is a rare dedication for a church but this one is rare in many ways, not least because of its lofty situation. The present church was built in 1850 on the site of a Saxon church. On a clear day it is said you can see eight counties. The interior has a small plaque narrating part of the eventful life of Martha of Provence to whom the church may be dedicated. In the late 1800s St Martha's collapsed after a huge explosion in the Chilworth Gunpowder Works half a mile away (the works having been upgraded to the manufacture of dynamite).*

- 5 Keep straight on, with the church on your right, on a sandy track. The track curves right and left, meeting an even wider track and you have terrific views across to Blackheath and the Greensand Hills. Shortly, at a fork in the track, take the **right** fork, the wider down-hill path. Where the path splits by some birch trees, you can take either branch as they quickly meet again. At a 3-way fingerpost, a bridleway joins from the right. After another 80m you reach a *second* 3-way fingerpost pointing left for the NDW. Fork **left** here on a sandy, only slightly narrower woodland path, in the direction of the NDW. This path soon goes over a diagonal crossing path and continues downhill. After a total of 300m on this path, you come out of the woods near a house and a tarmac lane. Don't join the lane\* but turn **left** on a track and immediately **right**, still on the NDW, on a tortuous and narrow woodland path which runs parallel to the lane with a large meadow on your left. After 400m, this narrow and gnarled path suddenly turns right and takes you down steps to the lane. (\*In very muddy conditions some people walk along the lane.)

- 6 Cross the lane and go steeply up through a wooden barrier. (Continuing a little further along the lane would lead to the Newlands Corner White Lane car park.) In 15m ignore a steepish path on your left and keep straight on under a large yew, uphill, following the white acorn symbols. You are now on the great open hillside, a popular part of the North Downs adjoining Newlands Corner. Your path merges with another path coming from the left at another acorn symbol and curves up to a fingerpost. Veer **right** here on a very wide level path with the green hillside stretching away to your right with more views across the valley. You reach a very wide grassy space. Keep **left** here, close to the trees, in the direction of the NDW. (Many people follow the path straight ahead across the centre of the grass – the advantage of keeping left is that the higher path gives you wider views, all the way to the South Downs.) Follow the path round on a wide arc, passing several tempting bench seats. Almost at the end of the arc, just past a seat, there is a post with the number "5" on it and, looking to your left, you will see a wooden post with a NDW arrow, almost hidden in the bushes. Go **left** here into the murky shrubbery, keeping to the main path amidst a host of branch-offs. Your path leads through some very dark yews – a striking contrast to the bright hillside. It runs in the direction you were on for about 150m and then makes a definite **left** turn. Finally you come out to the rear end of the Newlands Corner car park (main alternative start). Your continued route



will be straight across, a fraction left, on a dirt path between short stumps into woods. But first you will want a break for refreshments ...



WC



Many walkers who arrived by car have now reached the end of the adventure. But everyone now turns **right** through the car park to near the entrance where there is a Visitor Centre, shop and café; the café is famous for its excellent hamburgers and its (fairly) polite motorcyclists. The *Plucky Pheasant* café/restaurant, just across the road, has generated favourable comments.

*Newlands Corner was previously called "Fairyland", for good reasons. It forms the eastern end of the Albury Downs. It is part of the privately-owned Albury Estate but Surrey C.C. negotiated an access agreement and assigned management duties to the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Newlands Corner costs a vast sum annually to maintain and for this reason the SCC have agreed to introduce parking charges and to install an "educational play trail". This plan has been hugely controversial with pressure groups campaigning against "monetising the countryside". In 1926 Newlands Corner appeared in the news when writer Agatha Christie's car was found abandoned. After a search, she turned up ten days later in Harrogate.*



The **North Downs Monster** continues from here if you are returning by train.

- 7 After possible refreshment, enjoying the views from Newlands Corner, walk away from the entrance to the far end of this large car park. 20m before the tarmac ends at a low metal barrier, turn **right** on a wide path into woods, going between some short stumps. This dirt path leads off diagonally. In 200m or so, at a junction with a marker post, ignore the junction on your right and keep straight on, using the width of the path to skip round any mud. You may have noticed that you are on part of the *Self-Guided Trail (SGT)*. At first, you pass under more yew trees, until suddenly the terrain is much lighter with bracken and scattered birch trees, with a valley sloping down on your right. 400m from the car park, you meet a diagonally crossing path. Go straight over, passing a marker post, still on the SGT. Only 30m after the crossing path, your path forks. **Leave** the main level path, thus leaving the SGT, and instead fork **right**, slightly downhill through bracken. In only 40m, your path forks again. Fork **right** again on a very narrow descending path, ignoring the more level left fork. In 80m your path reaches the bottom of the valley where there is a wide sandy path.
- 8 Turn **left** on the wide valley path in what is known as Walnut Tree Bottom, an odd name since the trees are mainly oaks. Follow this path, avoiding several tempting paths leading off. After more than ½ km you pass a flint wall on your left, come over a low barrier and pass a house, *Keeper's Cottage*. The track is now a stony drive and a meadow comes into view on your left. 100m after the start of the meadow, look to your left for a marker post. Fork **left** here, thus leaving the drive, on a much narrower dirt path, slightly uphill.
- 9 The path gradually rises and finally comes out into the open at the edge of a golf course with good views to your right. Keep straight ahead with the golf links on your right. After sweeping round the green, your path comes up to a fork. The path straight ahead only goes to the clubhouse, so take the **left** fork. Your path bends right and comes to a marker post. Once again, keep **left** avoiding the golfer's path that only leads to the "19<sup>th</sup> hole". You are now walking along the top left-hand edge of a large grassy space with trees on your left and the occasional memorial bench from where you can enjoy a breather with views of Woking. Finally, your route curves up to

the left by a large house, a junction of paths and a sign reminding you that you have been walking on Merrow Downs. Keep ahead and veer **right** on a residential road, Warren Road.

- 10** **See maps near start.** After 300m on this rather smart avenue, you pass a bench and bus stop with a cul-de-sac, Rosetrees, and apartment blocks on your right. Turn **left** here on a concrete drive signposted *to Pewley Down*. At the bottom, keep right beside a small brick cottage. Ignore a stile on your left and continue past a small farm on your left. This wide high chalky track has some great views now over the northern parts of Guildford, including the Cathedral. After 600m, you come out through a gap in trees to a complete change of views: a spectacular vista over southwest Surrey.



This is Pewley Down, a hugely popular beauty spot, especially for every breed of dog. From here you can see a range of hills: from the left, Hascombe Hill, Black Down in Sussex (with its long flat top) and Gibbet Hill, part of the Hindhead uplands (*all explored in other walks on this site*). Burwood Farm is down in the valley on your left.

- 11** Turn immediately **right** along the lush top edge of the Down, avoiding the Friary Brewery toposcope which is further left. Exit at the far right-hand corner by some wooden gates and keep ahead on a residential road, Pewley Hill. This road will lead you into the centre of town. *The turreted house on your right soon is an old semaphore station, part of a chain between Hindhead and Wisley which relayed news from Portsmouth, including Nelson's victories.* At the bottom the road steepens and comes to a junction. (**See enlarged map near start.**) Cross the road ahead and turn **right**, passing the *March Hare* pub. As you keep round to the left, you reach an entrance to Guildford Castle. As a preliminary, it is worth taking the entrance on the left of the main path, for a stroll in the Castle Garden. If you continue to the far end, you will find the Alice Garden, which contains a sculpture of *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. Continuing your route on the main path, you will find an entrance to the Castle on your right, well worth a short detour.

*Welcome to Guildford Palace! During its early life, the Castle was a luxurious residence, used by medieval kings. Built shortly after the Norman Conquest, it was fortified during the "Troubles" of Stephen's reign and the de Montfort rebellion and became a prison, right up to the Civil Wars of the 1600s. In 1885 it came to the Guildford Corporation and it was restored, with gardens and the public pleasure ground that you see today.*

- 12** Returning to the main path, keep going, passing Castle Cliffe Gardens on your left and passing under the Castle Arch to a quiet road, Quarry Street.



(*On your left is the main town car park.*) Turn **right** on this road, passing the Guildford Museum and the *Kings Head* pub. You pass St Mary's Church on your left (with its ancient tower dating from the 900s) and quickly reach the High Street which is pedestrianised on your right and offers many opportunities to shop and take refreshment.



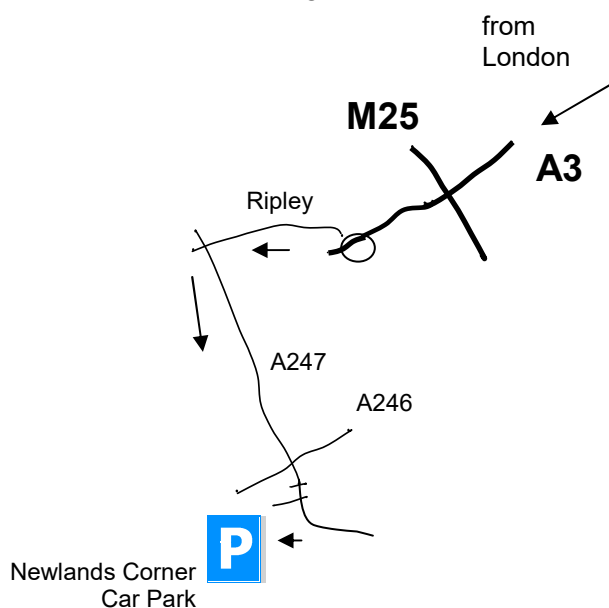
*The statue of the jubilant "Surrey Scholar" is by Allan Sly.* Turn **left** down the High Street and go over a major road junction to cross the river by the pedestrianised Town Bridge. (*If you did not arrive by train, your route continues immediately left, by the White House pub and left again to the river, re-winding to section [2].*) Turn immediately **right** beside the river with a car park on your left. After an underpass, look for the old *1913 Electric Works* building across the river. Go **left** here, diagonally up steps, and out to a main road. Go down steps into a subway and turn **right** under the road, leading to Guildford Station where the walk began.

## Getting there

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By bus/train: start and finish at Guildford Railway Station.

By car: To get to the **Newlands Corner car park** from the London area, take the A3 towards Guildford and turn off after Wisley onto the B2215, signposted Woking, through Ripley and, 2 miles=3 km after the village, turn left at a roundabout on the A247 signposted West Clandon. Follow the road through the village, past the entrance to Clandon Park and the church, to major traffic lights on the Leatherhead-Guildford road. Go straight over, uphill. The car park is at the top on the right.



Other possible starts are the Chantries car park (postcode **GU4 8AW**), St Martha's Hill car park on Halfpenny Lane (approximate postcode **GU4 9PZ**) and the White Lane car park near Newlands Corner (approximate postcode **GU4 8PS**).

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