



Built of local Bargate stone with chalk for the features needing shaped stone, St Catherine's chapel – like St Martha's – would have originally been plastered over and whitewashed.

Though there are signs it has been altered, little is known about the building itself, as it fell out of use after the Reformation in the 16th century to become the roofless ruin of today.

Another attraction to the site may have been a hermit. In 2020 a cave was discovered on the hillside, which had been partly destroyed by the railway tunnel. There were religious symbols carved on the walls, and it could have been a hermit's cave. He might also have operated the ferry, as it was common for hermits to live off the fares or offerings. Hermits always attracted visitors, even though they were trying to live solitary lives.

The founder of St Catherine's may have been inspired by the hilltop site of St Martha's. Catherine was often the dedication for hilltop churches and chapels, because it was said that her body was carried by angels to Mount Sinai when she died. Despite its elevated position, the chapel would have been very convenient for travellers along the east-west sand track, or the Guildford to Godalming (and Portsmouth) road with which it formed a crossroads, to call in for a prayer or blessing, or to hear mass. The annual fair would also attract travellers. It is very likely that there were relics in the chapel, and the striking situation and convenient position on a busy road may well have attracted pilgrims. To reach the hill from the east, travellers would have had to cross the River Wey. Although there was a ferry here in historic times, there is no definite evidence for a medieval one.



Pilgrimages were very popular in the Middle Ages. A pilgrimage is a journey to a special place for religious reasons. Usually people went to a church or cathedral to visit the burial place of a saint, hoping he or she would grant their prayers or cure their sickness. Journeys could be long or short. All medieval churches had relics of saints, either the whole body or a few bones, an item a saint once wore, or even a statue or painting which was thought to work miracles. A pilgrimage could be a journey to a nearby church, or one in the same county or more distant place, including shrines in other countries. Pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem and Compostela in Spain were particularly important, although most people were not able to travel that far.

Going on pilgrimage was not an essential part of the Christian religion, but people had a strong urge to visit sites and touch something physical, even from the beginnings of Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the 600s. There are no dedicated pilgrim routes in England as there were in Europe to Rome and Compostela. However, the road from London to Canterbury was well-known for pilgrims going to Thomas Becket's tomb in Canterbury Cathedral, which was the most popular shrine in England. In recent years, new pilgrimage routes have been created to link sites with religious significance. The Pilgrims' Way in Surrey is well-known, but is a Victorian invention. Pilgrims travelled on well-used roads, where there were inns or other places to rest, partly because they usually travelled in groups. They might also go by sea along the coast.



The Pilgrims' Way running across St Martha's Hill near Guildford

Sadly, the medieval shrines were destroyed at the Reformation when a different way of interpreting Christianity took hold: Protestantism. It was no longer felt that saints could intercede with God and people had to rely on their own prayers. Most shrines in Surrey are now lost to us, but we have evidence for a few, especially St Martha's and St Catherine's near Guildford. Although they look similar, both being on hilltops on the sand ridge, they are not connected with each other.

St Catherine's was a chapel, not a church. That means the priest could not baptise, marry or bury people there, but only celebrate the mass. The common interpretation of the chapel's location is that it was built so that people in the southern parts of Artington parish, at a distance from the parish church of St Nicholas in Guildford, could get to mass more easily. The chapel was probably built by the rector of St Nicholas' in about 1300, and soon afterwards he applied for a licence to hold an annual fair on the hill, which would earn him money. The fair was held for five days from St Matthew's day, 21st September, perhaps because St Catherine's day on 25th November was too late in the year. The licence to consecrate the chapel in 1328 mentions miracles occurring there and people flowing to it. Later there also was mention of pilgrims going to the fair.

Although no metalled roads lead to St Martha's, there are several paths coming from most directions, some aiming for the hilltop, others skirting it. It was clearly some where that people journeyed to from all directions. It is on or near a route along the Greensand ridge from the east, now called the A25, which continues as a track towards Farnham in the west, crossing the river at St Catherine's, once known as Drake – "Dragon" – Hill.

When St Martha's first appears in the documentary record, it was a parish church, with a tiny parish. In the late 12th century, the landowner of Chilworth manor gave the church to Newark Priory, as a source of income. When the monasteries were closed in the 16th century, the church was returned to Chilworth manor. The tower fell into ruin at an unknown date, perhaps in the 17th century (possibly as a result from an explosion at the gunpowder works in the valley below), and the nave was probably damaged at the same time. Afterwards, the chancel was walled off from the ruins and used as the church. The whole church was rebuilt in 1848, mainly out of the local ironstone, with a central tower instead of the original western one. The door and windows, though 1848 work, are partly based on the medieval features.

Other evidence for medieval pilgrimage in Surrey can be hinted at through references in wills. In 1533 there was a mention in a will of the Holy Sepulchre in Farnham churchyard, which could have been an object of pilgrimage. In the same year a Dorking man referred to Our Lady of Wotton, presumably an image which may have attracted pilgrims. Many pilgrimages were probably very local and are now lost to us. There are no major Surrey shrines, although the body of Henry VI was known to attract many pilgrims. He was buried in 1471 at Chertsey Abbey to avoid becoming a source of pilgrimage, but this did not work, and he was moved to Windsor in 1484 where pilgrimages continued. A pilgrimage badge for him was found at Newark Priory.

Metalwork items recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme also serve as evidence for local pilgrimage. Ampullae, such as the one below decorated in the form of a scallop shell, were a common pilgrim souvenir from the late 12th century and would have contained water from holy shrines and wells to be taken as a cure. Pilgrim badges were also popular in the 1500s and 1600s and indicated a pilgrimage taken. The iconography is often specific to certain shrines, such as the one to the right, which may be an image used for Our Lady of Walsingham, a Norfolk pilgrimage site also cited in a 1519 will from Titchey.



Lead-alloy pilgrim's ampulla dated c.1150-1350 from Betchworth © Surrey County Council



Copper-alloy pilgrim badge depicting Mary with a crucified Christ from West Horsley © Surrey County Council



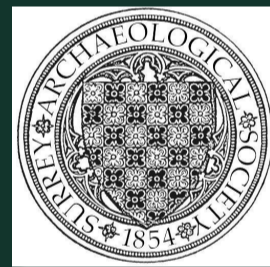
The Medieval Studies Forum is grateful to Dr Mary Alexander for compiling much of the historical content of this leaflet.

Cover image: 14th century carvings at St Catherine's cave shrine, discovered in 2020 © Archaeology South-East (please note the cave is not accessible to the public)

The origins of St Martha's remain far from clear. The cruciform shape of the medieval building is very unusual for a small isolated church and suggests that it might have once been much more important. One theory is that it began life as a minster – a religious community forming a focus for Christianity in an area. Minsters began to be founded in the 7th century by royalty. If St Martha's was a minster, it was probably founded later by a local landowner, perhaps in the 8th century. If there was not a minster at St Martha's, it is not clear why a church was built there. It could have been built on the site of a pagan shrine – hilltops were often chosen for these. A 6th-century pottery urn has been found nearby.

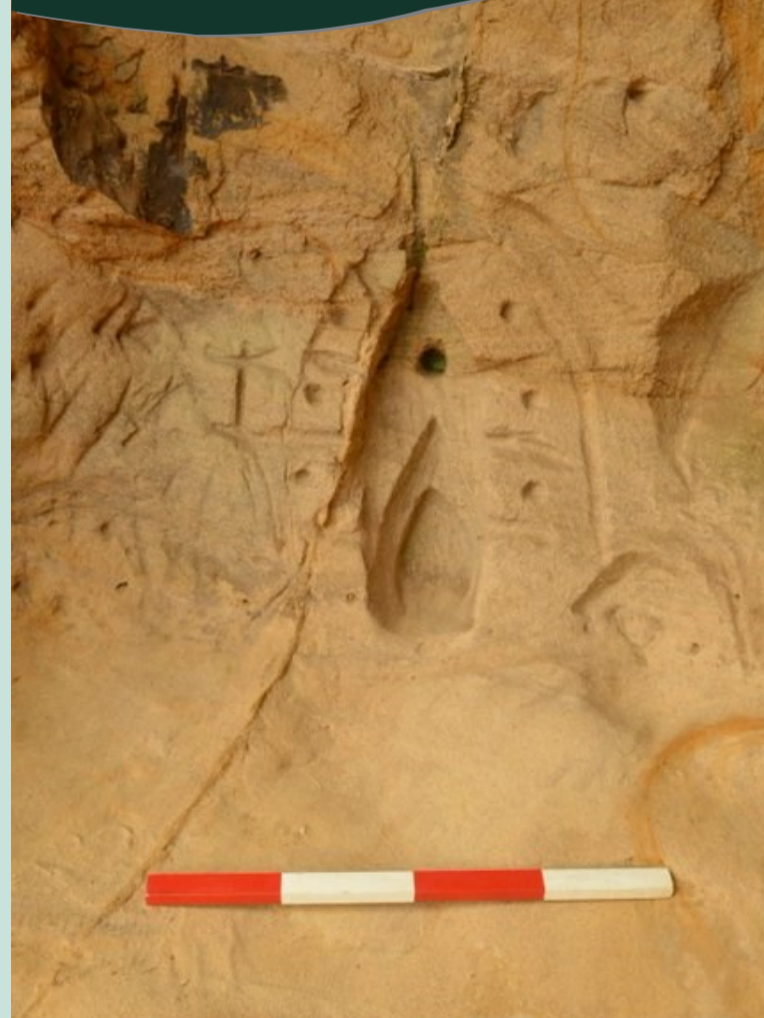


St Martha's is the older of the two. It is very unusual, being isolated on a hilltop, with no proper roads leading to it, and no village. The name is also unusual, as the dedication is unique in medieval England, but it is probably not the original one. The cult of St Martha, a Biblical figure, did not take off until the late 12th century, and that was in southern France. The earliest known phase of the church building has been ascribed to the early 1100s. This was the former west tower, a massive structure with a ground floor chamber that was covered by a stone vault, a highly unusual feature often associated with a particular focus like a shrine or important altar. In the 1270s, when Edward I's son was seriously ill at Guildford Castle, offerings were sent to several shrines for prayers for the child. They were all nationally important shrines, and included St Martha's. We do not know which saint was involved. There are later references to pilgrims going to St Martha's, and in 1486 the owner of Chilworth manor left money in his will to erect a marble cross on the hill, carved with scenes of the life of Thomas Becket. It is possible that there was a relic of the saint in St Martha's, but he was martyred in 1170, several decades after the vaulted west tower was built.



Medieval Pilgrimage

Self-guided heritage walk





Medieval Pilgrimage

Self-guided heritage walk

'Medieval Pilgrimage' walk from St Catherine's Chapel to Church of St Martha-on-the-Hill

The walk from St Catherine's to St Martha's has many route options which can be taken, depending on the type and length of journey preferred. Suggested circular routes from a starting point in Guildford are provided, both via a return train journey from Chilworth and as a walk entirely on foot across Pewley Down.

Length: approx. 4.6 miles (train option) / 6.3 miles (by foot)

Duration: the journey will range from 2.5 to 3 hours, not counting stoppage time at the sites

Moderate level of difficulty (steep climbs)

Heritage sites of interest

St Catherine's Chapel The ruins of this now roofless chapel are largely 14th century, though they sit on the site of an earlier chapel. Disused by 1546 and partly restored in the 18th century, the site is now railed off, though the interior can still be viewed. See its [list entry](#) and [HER record](#) for more info.

St Martha-on-the-Hill A few 12th century remains are incorporated into the church's mid-19th century rebuild, including a Norman font from Hambledon. See its [list entry](#) and [HER record](#) for more info.

Chilworth Gunpowder Works The remains of the gunpowder factory's middle works are largely late 19th century, although the mill site was almost continually used since 1626, including for paper-making. See its [list entry](#) and [HER record](#) for more info, including its [heritage trail leaflet](#).

Pewley Hill Mobilisation Centre This late 19th century mobilisation centre is no longer accessible, but see its [Victorian Forts and Artillery listing](#) for more info.

Guildford Castle This substantial Norman keep is 12th century (though with earlier origins) and visitable by paid entry (the bailey grounds are open to the public). See its [list entry](#) and [HER record](#) for more info.

St Mary's Church The church has pre-Conquest origins, with both Late Saxon and Norman features, including on the tower which are visible from the ground (the interior is normally locked in the day). See its [list entry](#) and [HER record](#) for more info.

Return route via Pewley Down

15 From the church, head back westwards along the North Downs Way to the previous point (9). At the path junction, continue straight ahead instead of turning left, and follow the footpath along the edge of Chanry Wood. Continue along the footpath for about a mile as it crosses the fields and heads NW across Pewley Down. As you enter a residential area (passing the site of Pewley Hill fort (16) on your left, continue onto Pewley Hill for another half mile, before turning right and immediately left again onto Castle St.

17 Continue down Castle St, passing Guildford Castle and Guildford Museum (18) on your left (note that the Museum is best entered via Quarry St). Turn right onto Quarry St, passing Guildford's parish church of St Mary's (19), before turning left onto High St.

20 Walk to the bottom of High St, crossing over Millbrook and the river, before turning right onto the path which runs alongside Portsmouth Rd Car Park. Take the pedestrian tunnel back to Guildford Station.

(Total length for this journey leg = 2.6 miles)

Return route via Chilworth Station

11 Exit St Martha's from the south gate and follow the footpath down the hill, passing Chilworth Manor Vineyard on your right (note this is a very steep descent, and a slightly longer option is to continue eastwards along the North Downs Way as you leave the church, turning right and downhill onto the Downs Link, and then back westwards on the path before reaching Chilworth Manor). As you reach Chilworth Manor on your right, continue straight downhill into Chilworth Gunpowder Mills, following the path over the pack horse bridge (12).

12 Once over the bridge, take the left fork left to the track junction, and then left again, arriving back at the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills and picnic area. Take the righthand path across the footbridge over the Tillingbourne and follow the path which passes Chilworth Infant School, before turning left onto Dorking Rd/A248.

13 An optional stop is The Percy Arms pub, next to the school and opposite from Chilworth Station (14). The train service is normally hourly, with the journey back to Guildford (stopping at Shalford) lasting about 10 minutes (note there is no ticket machine at Chilworth).

(Total length for this journey leg = 0.9 miles)

Main route from St Catherine's Hill to St Martha's Hill (Pilgrims Way)

6 Walk back down the footpath from St Catherine's Hill and turn right onto Ferry Ln. At the end of the lane, turn right and continue along the footpath as it crosses over the footbridge. Continue along this path on the other side of the river, following it as it turns right and crossing over the meadows until reaching Shalford Rd/A281.

7 Cross over Shalford Rd, using the crossing a few metres to your left, and continue along the Pilgrims Way / North Downs Way for 0.2 miles. At the end of the road, as it forks to the left, take the righthand Shepherd's Way, which will take you past Chantries Car Park.

8 At you come out of the carpark, turn left onto the road and take a slight right onto the footpath (North Downs Way). Continue along this route for over a mile as it runs along the northern edge of Chanry Wood, cutting across a meadow at one point, before re-entering the woods.

9 At the edge of the woods, the path will split. Turn right and continue for 0.1 miles, before turning left and walking for approximately another 0.1 miles, reaching Halfpenny Lane. Turn left onto Halfpenny Lane and walk for just over 100 feet, before continuing on the footpath to your right, passing St Martha's Hill Halfpenny Lane Car Park. Continue along this route for over 0.4 miles, as it reaches the church of St Martha-on-the-Hill (10).

(Total length for this journey leg = 2.5 miles)

Starting route from Guildford Station

1 Walk SE on Station Approach towards Walnut Tree Cl, taking the pedestrian tunnel and aiming for High St. Right before the White Horse pub, turn left onto the footbridge and cross over the Millbrook, turning right onto Millbrook/A281. Continue to follow Millbrook for 0.3 miles until passing The Wayside pub.

2 Turn right onto the footpath which crosses back over the Way, right before the Guildford Rowing Club. Follow the river, walking on its righthand side, for 0.5 miles.

3 Turn right onto Ferry Ln and walk uphill for 0.1 miles, before turning left onto Old Portsmouth Rd/A3100. The footpath which leads up the hill to St Catherine's Chapel (4) is immediately on your left.

5 An optional stop is Ye Olde Ship Inn on Portsmouth Rd, as you turn right out of Ferry Ln.

(Total length for this journey leg = 1.2 miles. Although the most direct route (1.0 miles) is along Portsmouth Rd, the more scenic walk is outlined here).

