



St Martha on the Hill and the Silent Pool A Pilgrimage

Distance: 9½ km=6 miles easy walking with some steep gradients

Region: Surrey

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Author: Fusszweig

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Refreshments: Newlands Corner

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

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Meadows, woodland, frequent sustained views, church on a hill, still waters

In Brief

This walk is a kind of pilgrimage, not only because it takes you along the Pilgrim's Way in Surrey but also because its central point is the church of St Martha on a hilltop near Guildford. This is a walk dominated by enduring views but there is also a long stretch in the deeply forested North Downs. The placid waters of the Silent Pool make a fitting start and end to the pilgrimage. Nourishment is available in plenty at Newlands Corner.

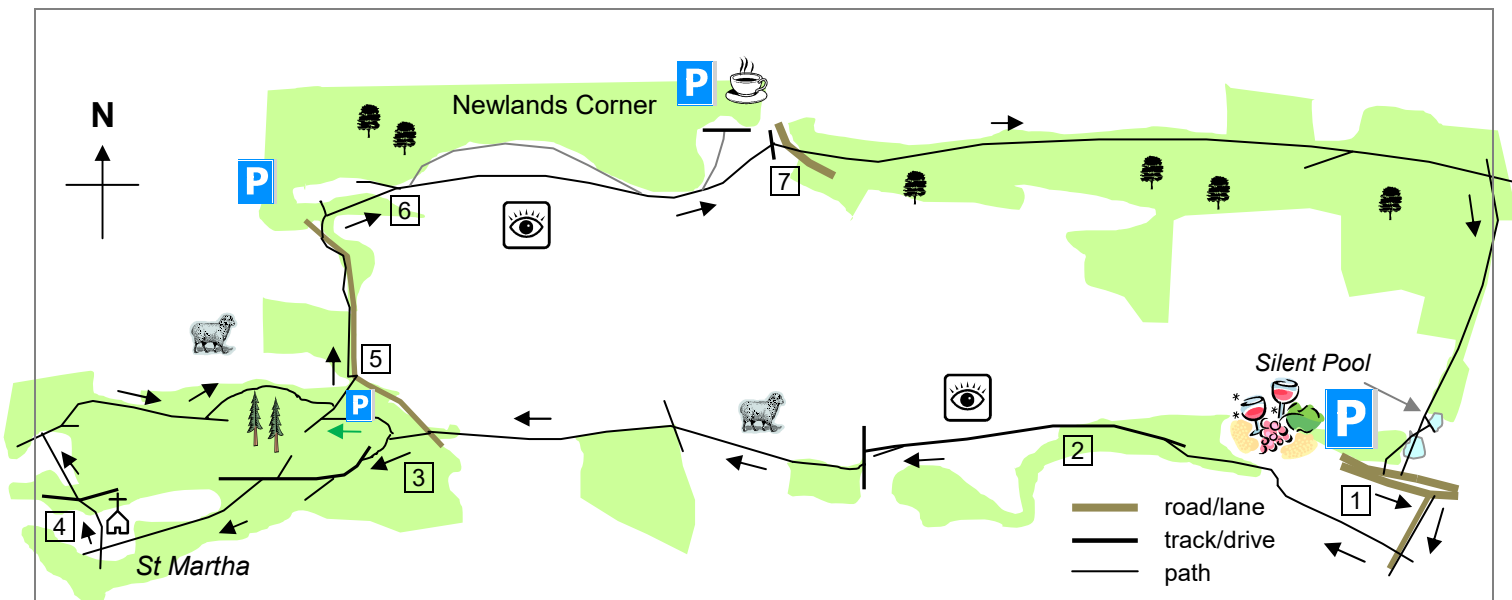


There are no nettles worthy of a mention on this walk. There is mud along the forest route but the path is wide enough to provide a leeway. So boots are only a good option for serious walkers. Your dog can certainly come on this walk, with a short lead for the double road crossing.

The walk begins at the **Silent Pool** car park on the A25, east of Guildford, Surrey, postcode **GU5 9BW**. For more details, see at the end of this text (→ **Getting There**).

The Walk

The Pilgrims Way is a historical route taken by travellers from Winchester to Canterbury, especially for the purpose of visiting the shrine of Thomas Becket. Becket was a man of great charisma and kudos, chancellor and foreign emissary, close confidante of King Henry II. In later life he embraced the Church, an institution whose power rivalled the king's, and became Archbishop of Canterbury. After a long dispute, the impulsive King Henry's patience snapped and he had Becket murdered in the cathedral. The Catholic church proclaimed him martyr.



1 From the Silent Pool car park, go out and carefully cross the main road. Turn **left** on the tarmac footway and **right** on a side road, signposted *Albury*, using a sheltered footway on the far side. As you near the mysterious *Catholic Apostolic Church* (see the “*Shere and Little London*” walk for more details) you will find a Victorian postbox where a track meets the road from your left. Turn **right** here as directed by a finger post. Cross the road and go through a wooden swing-gate onto a footpath. On your left is an avenue of lime trees planted by *Albury* for the Millennium. Your path leads through a metal kissing-gate and up the right-hand side of a sloping meadow. At the top, go over a stile and up through a tree plantation. The path passes the entrance gates to the Sandpit, a large sand quarry, thankfully hidden from this walk by trees. After passing the works and outbuildings on your right, the path rises and joins a wide track coming from the right. The noisy A25 road is now gradually receding into the distance. From the start of this path, as far as St Martha’s church, you will be walking part of the Pilgrims Way.

2 You pass a small farmyard with poultry, a large metal gate, and a house *Timbercroft*. A new fingerpost directs you straight ahead and your path now runs between attractive woodland and fields. Soon you come past a gate to a drive by a short terrace of cottages. Keep **right** on the drive to meet a T-junction with a wide track, well-named *Water Lane*. Turn **left** and immediately **right** at a blue arrow steeply uphill. (Immediately, hidden away on your left is a sandstone hollow with dangerous sheer walls.) Your path veers a little to the right to run down a sheep field on a sandy path, cutting the left-hand corner, with great views of the North Downs on your right. At the other side, you arrive at a crossing path, with the buildings of *New Barn Farm* on your right. Cross straight over on a path uphill (watching out for speeding bikes on a popular day) with a deep wood on your left. The fenced path leads up to an open meadow. Continue on the sandy path to meet tarmacked *Guildford Lane*. Cross straight over the lane by a fingerpost, on a narrow path opposite. On your right is the *St Martha’s* car park (an alternative start).



Decision point. The walk now continues to the church. In case you would like to skip this fascinating culmination to the pilgrimage, do the following: Turn sharp **right** through the centre of the car park and find a path leading away between three stumps, not far to the left of the metal overhead barriers that mark the exit for cars. This wide path winds gently uphill through birches and, after just under

200m, meets the North Downs Way (NDW) at a marker post with the acorn symbol. Turn sharp **right** on the NDW and resume the walk at section **5**.

- 3** Keeping the car park on your right, turn **left** on a narrow path before a noticeboard, curving slightly uphill to a 4-way fingerpost. Keep straight ahead, joining a much wider sandy path. At the next fingerpost, avoid a left fork, marked as the Downs Link, and continue, always uphill. Shortly after, the North Downs Way (NDW) joins you from the right and you quickly reach a very definite fork in the path. *Most walkers take the right fork, as you can too, but this quieter alternative makes for an interesting flanking approach to the church.* Take the **left** fork, the more level option, shaking off the crowds. The path is fringed with tall pines, allowing a fine view of Blackheath. The church is now visible on the hill to your right. You reach a 4-way crossing with a marker post. Turn **right** uphill to reach the wall of the churchyard where there are benches from where you can enjoy the view. Go through a little wooden gate into the churchyard and keep **left** to go round past the church entrance.



St Martha's was built in 1850 on the site of a much older Saxon church. It is not certain where it obtained its rather rare dedication to St Martha. Late in that century, part of the church collapsed as a result of an explosion at the Chilworth Gunpowder Works down in the valley. Its high exposed position has benefits though and it is said that on a clear day you can see eight counties. Several notable people chose to be buried in this spectacular location. One such is Lt-Gen Baron Bernard Freyberg, hero of both World Wars, whose grave is marked with a prominent "VC".

- 4** From the church entrance, continue on a path that goes diagonally across the little churchyard to go through another small wooden gate in the corner. Your direction is now dead straight, across the wide crossing path, onto another narrow path running down through bracken. (As a guide, the wide crossing path is your old friend, the NDW; on your left it goes down on a very broad rutted pathway under conifers – this is **not** your path!) The narrow path ahead comes down, in 150m or so, to a T-junction with a wider path. Turn **right** on this path, passing a marker stone bearing the lettering **GBB 1933** (the Guildford Borough Boundary). In 30m, at a marker post, veer **left** downhill on a path marked *Permissive Horse Ride*. This path bends right and leads you through woodland with grass pastures visible on your left. Your view of the pastures disappears in a wonderful shroud of tall redwoods. Just before an especially magnificent specimen, you meet a narrow path crossing diagonally. Fork **left** on this path under more redwoods and other conifers. *(If you miss this path, simply keep straight on to meet the NDW; but this scenic digression is a delightful alternative to the main path.)* Soon you are once again close to the grass meadows. Your path snakes its way through bracken and birch. Finally, after 350m in total, the path meets a wide path, the NDW, at a T-junction. Turn **left** on the NDW.
- 5** The NDW quickly comes down to a tarmac lane. Do not join the lane* but turn immediately **left** and **right**, still on the NDW, parallel to the lane. *(*In very muddy conditions some people walk along the lane.)* This narrow, gnarled and rather tortuous path runs beside a large pasture on your left. Finally it suddenly turns right, down some steps, crosses the lane and takes you steeply up through a (*smashed*) wooden barrier. *(Continuing a little further along the lane would lead to the Newlands Corner White Lane car park.)* Immediately ignore a path on the left and keep straight on following the white acorn symbols. You are now on the great open hillside, a popular part of the North Downs adjoining Newlands Corner.

6 Your path merges with another path coming from the left at another acorn symbol and leads 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. Shortly, the NDW forks left to run along the top of the green space close to the woodland, but most walkers simply keep straight ahead on a wide path. Keep to the right of the trees ahead to keep the views, but without losing the high ground. At a marker post, your route is straight on, staying on the NDW. *However, by forking left up the slope, past several bench seats, you reach the Newlands Corner car park (alternative start) with the Visitor Centre, shop and café; the café is famous for its excellent hamburgers and its polite motorcyclists; you can easily regain the NDW near the exit.* The NDW veers left, then right, over a stony track and across grass to the main A25 road.



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7 Cross the road carefully to take a path on the other side, going past a wooden barrier. You will be following this wide level woodland path for one mile. If necessary during the wetter months you can usually find a dry course, skipping over any muddy patches. After nearly 1½ km, a permissive horse ride joins from the right, by a marker post. After another 300m, you come to a 4-way fingerpost [*Jan 2022: with two “fingers” missing, including the relevant finger*]. Turn **right** here on a flinty path down under yews. You need to be careful as the path is steep in places, as well as stony and gnarled with roots. After nearly ½ km, an open field appears on your right. *This is Albury Organic Vineyard which cultivates a variety of whites and reds producing the renowned Albury Estate Sparkling and Silent Pool Rosé.* Nearly at the end of the vineyard you will see a path on your left which leads to the Silent Pool.

The Silent Pool is fed by a spring and filtered through chalk. The blue-green colour is due to minerals within the many layers of chalk. The pool is geologically interesting because it lies on a fault-line between the Lower Chalk of the North Downs and the clay and Upper Greensand to the south. As you might expect, the strangely still water has given birth to legends. According to one, a beautiful woodcutter's daughter was lost in the depths after being disturbed by a strange horseman whilst bathing. If you stare into the depths at midnight you can apparently see her.

There is a path running between the pool and the larger Sherbourne Pond with a bench seat. But don't cross to the other side, unless you wish to buy wine or the bespoke gin from the Silent Pool Distillers. Continue beside the pond to emerge onto a wide track coming from the vineyard on your right. Cross straight over the track onto a path opposite which leads to the car park where the walk began.

Getting there

By car: The Silent Pool is on the north side of the A25 road, near Shere. You can reach it from Guildford by following a sign for Dorking, or from London by coming through West Clandon and crossing straight over at the traffic lights. The Silent Pool is well marked on the left, just before the turn off for Albury. You can also come on the A25 from Dorking, in which case you need to reverse direction just after the turn off for Albury by filtering right.

By train/bus: buses 25 and 32 run from Guildford station to Shere, with a stop for “Albury adj Silent Pool”. Check the timetables.

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