

Gillingham Museum

The Quick Guide

Welcome to the Gillingham Museum. Besides the permanent displays listed below you will also find a number of displays which change from time to time.

1 Gillingham, An Aerial View

On entering the Museum, you are greeted on your left by an aerial view of the town's recent past. Gillingham

grew quickly after the coming of the railway. Since the 1960s it has expanded much more, and many of the fields near the town have been developed for housing.

2 Geology and Early Life

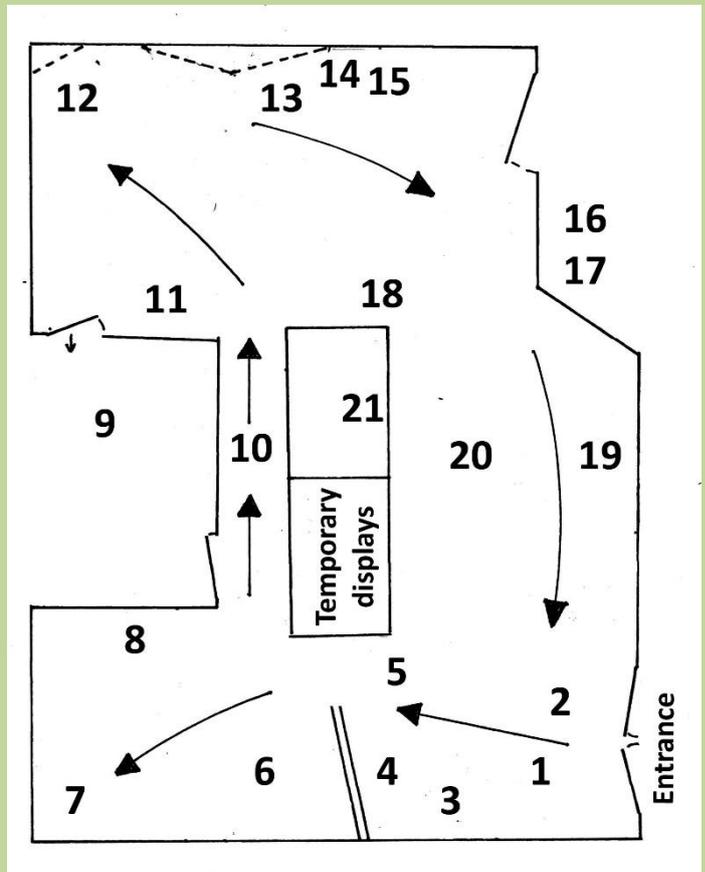
On your right is the geological history of the Gillingham area, from the time when the Blackmore Vale was under the sea, to recent geological times. The nearby cases show a selection of fossils, mostly from the Jurassic and Cretaceous beds around Gillingham.



Above is a **stained glass panel** recovered from the old vicarage at Rawson Court. The panel is dedicated to Robert Crowther Abbott, who became Bishop of Sherborne.

3 Built on Clay

The brickworks owned by the Gillingham Pottery, Brick, and Tile Company was one of the town's principal industries. The brickworks was opened in 1865 soon after the coming of the railway and supplied much of the building material for the growing Victorian town. It ceased working in 1967, and its site is now



occupied by an industrial estate and business park. Note the many different types of product made at the brickworks.

Above are the toll boards from the turnpike houses at Colesbrook and Madjeston; and some examples of the smaller machinery used in Gillingham industries.

4 1895 and 2012

This is one of many photos of the town in Victorian times and the earlier 20th century. The shop of Strange & Sons is still to be found, and was last occupied by an estate agent.

5 The Bacon Factory

Above the arch: The Gillingham bacon factory on Station Road was opened in 1859 and was in production until 1984. The factory was owned by Oake, Woods, & Co. and was widely known for its 'patent auto cured Wiltshire bacon'. It won a royal appointment from King Edward VII. A surviving building near the station was used by J.H. Rose & Sons until recent times..

6 Early peoples, Romans and Saxons

Around the Gillingham area can be found evidence of occupation by early Britons, Romans, and Saxons, including the site of a Romano-British farm at Wyke. The skeleton and other items of Romano-British times from the quarry at Todber were



excavated following a dig

organised in 1967 by the Gillingham Local History Society, with the help of boys from Gillingham School.

7 King's Court and the Royal Forest

This corner displays items relating to the royal forest of Gillingham, which occupied much of the area to the east of the town in medieval times. The Angevin kings (12th and early 13th centuries) hunted in the forest and stayed at a residence or 'palace' at King's Court. King John visited Gillingham on several occasions. The wall map shows the extent of the forest in 1624, just before it was finally enclosed.

Use the touch screen display to learn more about the Royal Forest.

8 The Railway Comes

The Salisbury & Yeovil Railway reached Gillingham in 1859, three years after the first turf was cut at a grand ceremonial occasion. The coming of the railway was a big stimulus to the town's industrial growth in the following decades. The displays show the wheelbarrow and the ceremonial spade used for the occasion.



9 The Victorian Room

This room has been used for displays of interiors in Victorian times, and now sometimes houses temporary exhibitions.



10 The Fire Engines

Gillingham's horse-drawn fire engine of 1790 is one of few surviving engines of its type in the country. For many years the appliance was kept in Purn's Mill, before being rediscovered for the Museum. Above is a series of fire insurance plaques recovered from various houses in the Gillingham area. An adjoining case shows some of the helmets and attire worn by local firemen.

11 Town Mills

The town mills, destroyed by fire in 1982, were the pride of Gillingham's architectural heritage. The site housed both a corn mill and a silk mill. The site, on the High Street opposite the Methodist church, is now occupied by the Barnaby Mill flats. The display case houses a number of items used in the silk mill.

12 Law and Order

By the emergency exit is a door from a cell in the police station; you can switch on the light to see the cell inside. Above is a part of the stocks which at an

earlier time were to be found in the churchyard. Below is a display case containing items used by local constables. You might also want to visit the old town lock-up in South Street.

13 War and Peace

The panel shows the different ways in which Gillingham people were involved in the two world wars. In World War 1 many young men from the town volunteered, some never to return, and the town had two Red Cross hospitals to provide for the war wounded.

14 The Town in 1880

This map is based on the 1886 OS 25-inch map of the town. It was produced to show the extent of mains sewerage (shown by the brown lines along the streets). It also records many of the town's landowners.

15 Lion Engine

On the floor below the map is the 'Lion', a small industrial engine built at Station Road in the 1920s. The factory belonged to Charles Maloney, who also owned the glue factory. The Lion engine was mostly used on local farms for driving machines, pumping water, etc.

16 Cups, Mugs, and Pipes

A display of ceramics and pottery items, including Coronation mugs, gifted to the Museum over the years.

17 Howe Family Tools

The Howe family were builders and farmers. Charles Howe was a past chairman of the Gillingham Local History Society and the author of Gillingham's first complete history. This collection of his family tools includes items used for a number of Gillingham's buildings.

18 Medals

A selection of medals and ribbons worn by servicemen from Gillingham who served the country from Victorian times to the 1960s.

19 John Constable in Gillingham

The artist John Constable was a friend of the Gillingham vicar John Fisher. He visited the town a number of times in the early 1820s and made a number of



sketches and paintings of local scenes. The display shows some of his best-known views, with the reproductions as near as possible to the original sizes.

You can follow the story of Constable in Gillingham through the use of the touch screen.

20 Bottles and household items

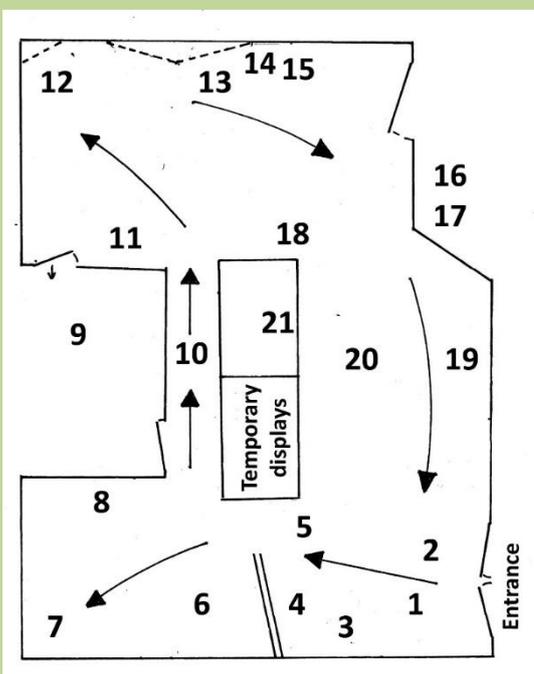
The glass cases house examples of bottles and other household items. These displays change from time to time.

21 The Town Crier

David Wathen was Gillingham's only town crier for over thirty years. Mr. Wathen, who died in 2018, could regularly be found at fetes, carnivals, and town events, wearing some of the costume and regalia shown here.

Above the Town Crier are two bicycles; the lower is an example of a **Magnet bicycle**, made by Light & Co. at Peacemarsh and Newbury. The **Queen's Head** was a public house in Queen Street, which closed in 2003.

Find out more? You can learn more about other topics in the history of Gillingham from the folding display **Gillingham: The Story of a Dorset Town** on the wall near the Constable display; and from the books and booklets for sale in the display case by the reception desk.



Interested in joining the Local History Society or helping to run the Museum? Take a membership application form from the reception desk.

Keeping Our Past Alive

Gillingham Local History Society