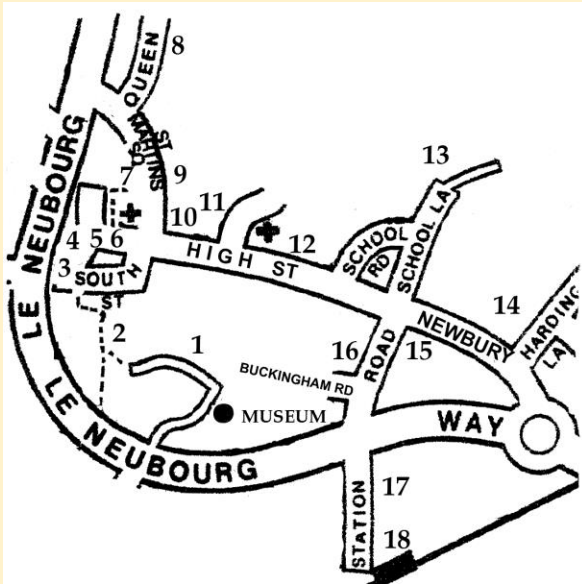


Gillingham A Town Trail



Gillingham, always pronounced with a hard 'G', has never fulfilled the traditional Dorset image of picturesque streets and pretty thatched cottages. Instead, its interest lies in the legacy of several ages from the past.

Early visitors, including the artist John Constable, were struck by its picturesque setting at the meeting of three rivers – the Stour, Shreen, and Lodden. Copies of all his sketches and paintings of Gillingham scenes can be seen in the Gillingham Museum.

The arrival of the railway in 1859 greatly changed the fortunes of the town, producing

two generations of economic boom. Gillingham's new industries were to define the character of the town well into the second half of the last century.

i indicates that a separate information leaflet is available from the Museum website.

The trail begins and ends at the car park by the Gillingham Museum, which shares a building with the Gillingham Library, off Le Neubourg Way. From the car park, follow the distributor road to the rear of Waitrose. Do not turn over the footbridge marked to the Square and High Street, instead continue to the exit of the supermarket car park and turn right along a path which goes through some trees and then past some thatched cottages.

1 The library and Waitrose buildings occupy a part of Gillingham known as Chantry Fields. Excavations in the 1990s made when the car park was being built uncovered evidence of substantial medieval buildings. The wooded path past **Chantry** and **Chantry Ford** cottages gives an idea of the rural character of Gillingham in earlier centuries.

2 The path turns right over **Chantry Bridge**, a modern replacement for an earlier stone arched bridge. On the right of the bridge the site of a ford can be seen. The path leads into the **Square**, the oldest part of Gillingham.

3 In the Square and to your right, the narrow street is South Street, once known as Back Lane. The shop on the corner of South Street/ The Square was once called **Coachman's Corner**. Along here an old doorway marked 'Gillingham Imperial Silver Band' leads into a rehearsal room which was once part of the Phoenix inn. Further along and marked by a plaque is the **Lock-up**, Gillingham's smallest building, also once known as the 'Blind House' on account of the lack of windows.



It was built around 1750 and was used to detain miscreants until the opening of the Police Station in 1891. ⓘ

4 Cross the Square towards the church gate. The red brick building now behind you, used as Farnfield's solicitors offices, was once Gillingham's first bank, built around 1860. The house on the left side of the square with the



name of **Rorty Crankle** (seen above the door) was once the home of a physician, the two doorbells for day and night calls are still to be seen. Round the corner at the traffic lights you can look across Le Neubourg Way to **Plank House**, where a blue plaque commemorates its use as a World War I Auxiliary Hospital. ⓘ

Still in the Square, the cafe premises and Slade Centre above, were once the **Slade department store**, built around 1900. ⓘ The offices on the corner of the path by the church gate had been in continuous use as a pharmacy for 150 years until closure in 2008.

5 The **Phoenix** inn, on the corner of the Square and High Street, is one of Gillingham's oldest inns, dating from at least the sixteenth century. This part of the Square was the site of the **Guildhall**, a principal building of the town in



medieval times. A few yards along the High Street, a blue plaque identifies the former **Free School**, founded in 1516. A former pupil of the school was Edward Hyde, who later became the Earl of Clarendon and minister to Charles II. [i](#)

6 The parish church of **St. Mary the Virgin** dates from the fourteenth century, although most of it was rebuilt in 1838-9. The oldest part is the chancel. Inside the church the oldest monument is one to the Jesop brothers; John Jesop was vicar from 1579 to 1625. There is an 18-foot high monument to the Dirdoe family of Milton, and a modern stone carved altar reredos. *A detailed guide can be obtained within the church.*

7 Follow the path which starts to the left of the church gate. This path, known as Church Walk, takes you round the back of the church and through another gate into **St. Martin's Square**, part of Queen Street. Along the path notice the house which has pieces of masonry which came from the old church when it was rebuilt.

8 Cross the square and continue to walk away from the church along Queen Street as far as **Portland House**, a converted chapel, on the right of the street. This was the original Wesleyan Methodist church built in 1836. The adjoining **Wesley Garden** was the burial ground, recently restored under a Millennium project. Opposite is **Tower House** of 1901, conspicuous by a windowed 'lookout' on its roof. Adjoining Tower House is **Jubilee House**, which bears a plaque of 1897 commemorating Queen Victoria's jubilee and displaying the names of different parts of the Empire.

9 From Portland House return along Queen Street, walking past the church towards the junction with the High Street. **Lime Tree House**, a handsome eighteenth-century house, may be typical of many similar houses which were once found in the town. The frontal appearance of **The Barton** belies its former use as tailor's shop for many decades until the 1970s. Opposite the

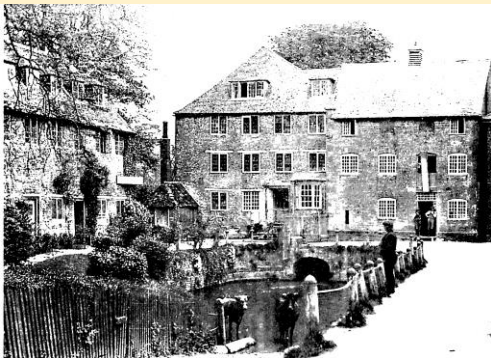
church, the church hall or **Vicarage School Room** was once part of a range of buildings behind the Old Vicarage, altered and rebuilt in 1838. ⓘ

10 The corner with the High Street is known as **Spring Corner**, and a plaque can be seen marking the site of the sinking of Gillingham's first well in 1801. The building behind the well is **Rawson Court**, a distinctive 'arts and crafts' building dating from 1883, originally built as a new vicarage and used as such until 1983. Across the High Street from Rawson Court is the **Red Lion**, which was used from time to time as a meeting place of the manor courts.

11 Turn left into the High Street and walk to the **Town Bridge**, which crosses the Shreen. The outer facing parapet bears a date stone 'County Bridge



1800'. A plaque on the bridge identifies it as the scene painted by the artist John Constable while he was staying in Gillingham in 1823. ⓘ Facing the bridge, the large block of Barnaby Flats is the site of the **Town Mills**. This was one of the town's most distinctive structures and housed both a corn mill



and silk mill. The building was sadly destroyed by fire in 1982.

Adjoining the bridge is the original site of Gillingham's **War Memorial**. The Memorial has since been moved to its present position in the long stay car park.

12 From the Town Bridge, walk up the High Street as far as School Road. This part of the High Street was rebuilt in the later nineteenth century and gradually became the town's main thoroughfare. On the left, the **Wesleyan Methodist Church** was opened in 1877 to replace the earlier church on Queen Street. **Lloyd's Bank**, with its frontage of classical columns, was built as the Wilts and Dorset Bank in 1875. Further up the High Street, **Crocker's** household goods and ironmongery shop has been in continuous use as an ironmongers since the 1880s. The

doorway up the steps once led into the house of James Dunn, who later became a nationally-known seeds merchant.

13 Turn left into School Road, which then forms a loop, returning to the High Street as School Lane. The Gillingham **Primary School** was once the Board School, opened in 1875. Next door is the **Police Station** and **Town Hall**, with a datestone of 1890. The Town Hall was originally built as the Magistrates Court. The driveway leads into **Gillingham School**, which originated as the Grammar School in 1876, succeeding the Free School of earlier centuries. Adjoining is the Royal British Legion building, with a plaque placed by the Gillingham Local History Society, commemorating the use of the site as during World War I and afterwards.



14 From School Lane, turn left and walk along Newbury as far as the junction with Harding's Lane. At the corner with Hardings Lane are the Royal Lodge apartments, once the site of the **Royal Hotel**. This hotel, originally known as the Railway Hotel, was a distinctive building in the town and a bustling site for traders on market day.



15 Return along Newbury to the former **National Westminster Bank**, on the corner with Station Road. This began as Stuckey's Bank in 1900, on the site of a former lecture hall. On the opposite corner the single-storey building started life as the National Provincial Bank in 1923. It has subsequently been used as the town library, and now has community uses.




16 Turn left and walk along Station Road. The building on the corner of Buckingham Road was used in the early 1900s as a girls' school; in World War I as a Red Cross hospital; and later as the Gillingham Masonic Lodge and Agricultural Society office. ⓘ

17 Continue along Station Road towards the station, crossing over Le Neubourg Way. This part of Station Road is a reminder of Gillingham's past industrial history. On the right side of Station Road, the Asda store occupies the site of the **Hudson and Martin** saw mills and timber yard, which for a century produced timber from mostly local woods and suppliers.

Across Le Neubourg Way the **Old Market Centre** marks the site of the Gillingham livestock market (closed 1959), the market hall, and of the extensive glue factory which once belonged to the Maloney company. On the right, the brick buildings once housed a processing plant for **milk and dairy** products. The name 'United Dairies (Wholesale) Ltd' can be seen on this building, which was once much larger.



Further along again, the J.H. Rose building is the only surviving structure from the **Oake, Woods bacon factory**, which remained in production until 1984. The house facing the station, now divided into flats, was once the **South-Western hotel**, always busy and crowded with local farmers on market day.


18 Gillingham Station was built for the Salisbury and Yeovil Railway, which opened as far as Gillingham in 1859. The S & YR was later absorbed into the London and South-Western Railway. A blue plaque commemorates the opening. The station was designed by the architect Sir William Tite, who designed many of the stations for the L & SWR. 



On your return, turn left at the traffic lights and walk along Le Neubourg Way past Asda; you will see the Museum building on your right.

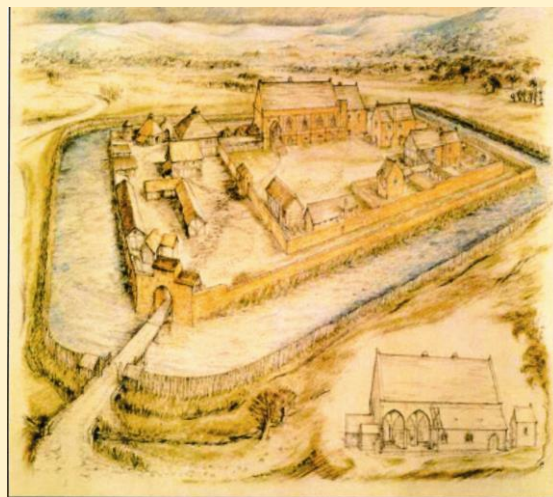
After the walk, you may wish to visit the Museum. Opening times are displayed in the Library foyer.

Outside the town centre, some other locations of interest are:

Kings Court, the site of a royal 'palace' or hunting lodge in the Forest of Gillingham. It was particularly visited by John and Henry III. This was a moated site of which striking earthworks remain. Further  on King's Court can be found at the location and in a Museum publication.

Kings Court lies on the B3081 Shaftesbury road. After the B3092 junction with traffic lights, take the second main turning to the left into Kings Court road.

Langham chapel was built as a private chapel to commemorate losses to the Manger family in World War I. It was designed by Charles Ponting and built to a vernacular style with rubble walls and thatched roof.



The chapel can be found a mile and a half from the town on Langham Lane, NGR ST 789265.