

Guildford is the county town of Surrey and the only town with small urban parishes. It was the only urban settlement in the county at the time of Domesday Book (excluding Southwark which was always related to London). There was a settlement at Guildford from around AD 500. In the 10th century a planned town was laid out north of the original settlement, with a central High Street and a ditch enclosing land north and south of that street. The main part of the town was divided into three parishes. St.Mary's church in Quarry Street, closest to the river and the original settlement, is important evidence for the earliest settlement of Guildford which was related to the pagan Saxon cemetery on Guilddown on the opposite side of the river. Holy Trinity Church is further up the High Street, and St.Nicholas on the other side of the river, suggesting that they were founded later than St.Mary's. Holy Trinity has been linked in the same parish with St. Mary's since 1699.

Holy Trinity Church is an important Grade 1 listed church occupying a prominent site in the centre of this historic town. Built in 1763, mainly in the Palladian style, it is the largest Georgian church in Surrey but with a medieval chantry chapel, all that remains of the original medieval church, on the same site, which was all but destroyed when its tower collapsed in 1740. The present building was erected through the efforts of the mayor and other prominent townspeople of the parish, a late Victorian chancel and sanctuary in Byzantine style being added to meet changed liturgical preference in 1888. With the creation of Guildford Diocese in 1927, Holy Trinity became the pro-cathedral, a status that continued until the new cathedral, on Stag Hill, was consecrated in 1961. Holy Trinity still serves as the civic church for the town.

Designed by architect James Horne and built in local red brick, the church dates from just after London's 'Classical' churches but predates the large number of 'Gothic' churches built during Queen Victoria's reign. The north entry door, with its pediment above, reached by curved steps directly from the High Street makes a significant statement about the place of the church in the life of the town at the time of building and was designed to provide a ceremonial entry for civic processions coming from the Guildhall. This door is once again in regular use through the addition of glazed interior doors providing protection from the weather and inviting entry.

Contemporary drawings show the new church was possibly raised at a higher level and probably on the rubble of the old building. A recent geophysical survey revealed probable vaulting below the present floor level. The battlemented brick tower at the west end has a clock first given by Lord Onslow in 1791 with his family motto "festine lente" (on slow) beneath it. In 1843, the chimes of the clock were composed by George Wilkins, the organist of St Nicolas' church, following one of several restorations.

In the southwest corner, the oldest surviving part of the church is the Weston Chantry Chapel (1540) notable externally for its chequer-board flint and freestone pattern, common in southern England. It is possible that parts of this structure came from the Dominican Friary in the town dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539.

The original small eighteenth century apse was replaced in 1888 with a chancel and side chapels designed by the diocesan architect, Sir Arthur Blomfield. Providing space for this extension necessitated substantial alterations in the churchyard. In the original plan, the southern transept was to have extended into the churchyard. Unfinished interior brickwork may still be seen on the exterior from the churchyard. In the south east corner, a single story brick-built clergy vestry was added in 1913.

The interior of the nave still shows something of its austere eighteenth century design. The span of the unsupported ceiling is remarkably wide. This is suspended from beams in the roof space, the timber supplied by the Duke of Somerset from Petworth Park. The slate roof is supported by roof timbers in a truss and kingpost arrangement with iron braces. In 1869 Henry Woodyer, who worked locally, removed the north and south galleries in the nave leaving only the west gallery seen today. At the same time the original double tier of windows was redesigned into a single tier and the box pews reduced in height by six inches, taking off the doors. The pulpit, given by Mayor Shrub in 1769, was placed against the east wall, its forbidding height reduced and the clerk's desk removed. Part of this desk survives as a display case for a copy of the 'Vinegar' Bible, given by the Rt. Hon. Arthur Onslow, in the north aisle. The eagle lectern was given in 1876 when Bible Boards were removed from the apse.

Designed by Sir Arthur Blomfield, the chancel with its fine wall paintings, some by Buckridge and Floyce, was added in 1888. Two Clayton and Bell windows, donated for the original apse between about 1860 and 1881, were re-sited in the side chapels, or transepts, of the extended apse, while a third window was re-sited in the west window of the stairwell to the gallery. On the north side, the Queen's Chapel is dedicated as a memorial to the Surrey Regiment of that name. The opus sectile reredos, showing Melchizadek blessing Abraham on his return from war, was installed in 1905 and is by Powell and Son. The chapel on the south side holds the organ and the handsome seventeenth century marble memorial to George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1611 to 1633, which survived the collapse of the medieval church. George Abbot was born in Guildford and built the Hospital of The Blessed Trinity opposite the church. Its royal charter was granted in 1622 to provide accommodation for local people in need and over sixty years of age, which it continues to do. A hammered iron choir screen by Benham and Froude was added in 1901 with similar screens put in place for the side chapels in 1909. Following Sir Arthur Blomfield's recommendations, the pews were removed in 1888 and replaced by chairs. However at the south-east end of the nave, pews were retained, in collegiate orientation, specifically intended for the use of residents of Abbot's Hospital.

The Weston Chapel was used as a burial place by the family of that name until the late eighteenth century. It has been the choir vestry since 1867, when a surpliced choir began to take part in liturgical worship. Ownership of the chapel only passed to the church in 2005, transferred by descendants of the Weston family. A Roman Catholic Mass is still, potentially, celebrated there for the family once a year. A small kitchen and toilet area, including one with disabled facilities, has recently been refurbished.

At the west end of the church, below the tower, the entrance porch holds parts of sixteenth and seventeenth century monuments from the medieval church. Originally two further porches provided access; the southwest porch remains in use, for disabled access, whereas the northwest porch does not. A staircase in the southwest entry still leads to the west gallery where the pews were rearranged in 1869 after the removal of the side galleries. The tower rooms, reached by a spiral staircase in the tower, were used by Baker's School between 1763 and 1860. In 1909 the northwest entry was converted into a baptistery. Later, in 1994, the Edwardian alabaster font, given in memory of two of Lewis Carroll's sisters who lived locally, was removed to the south wall in the body of the church where an Icon of John the Baptist, specially commissioned from Brother Anselm at Alton Priory, now hangs above the font. The former northwest porch was rededicated as St. Luke's Chapel, now used for private prayer and small mid-week Eucharists.

Three ledger stones from the old church were re-laid in the new church, across the nave in front of the apse and are still in place. A tarazzo marble floor was donated for the chancel in 1901. In 1910 the side chapels were paved in black and white marble to replicate the design indicated by fragments from the medieval church found during the building work in 1888. The black and white stone flooring in the nave was installed in 1994 together with the podium for a movable nave altar.

A significant memorial to Arthur Onslow (died 1768), Speaker of the House of Commons throughout the reign of George II, is now sited on the south wall, having occupied various positions over the years. Arthur Onslow, of nearby Clandon Park, was a benefactor of the newly built church. He donated service books for the use of the mayor and corporation, and their ladies. The books are preserved, a number in their original bindings.

The church's strong civic connection and link with the Queen's Regiment, probably explain the unveiling, in 1904, of memorials to Guildford men and to members of the Queen's who died in the Boer War. Windows on the north side of the nave commemorate members of the regiment and a substantial war memorial to the fallen of the two World Wars, in oak, stands along the north wall.

The churchyard lies to the south of the church, with cast iron railings on a low brick wall on the east and south sides flanked by a public footpath. There is a high brick wall to the west. Through a gateway a footpath runs across the churchyard, near the west wall, to join the approach to the west door which is paved with Sussex marble grave slabs. The small amount of ground to the north of the church is substantially above the level of the High Street, separated from the public pavement by a brick wall and cast iron railing partly dating from 1712. There is a wide gateway, flanked by stone pillars for the iron gates, with a flight of steps running up to the north door from the High Street .

Holy Trinity churchyard was closed to burials in 1856 although a few interments still took place, the last in 1928. One tomb renovated in the nineteenth century commemorates sixteenth century members of the Shaw family. However, most of the existing grave stones mark interments made between 1770 and 1856. Some stones were moved in 1887 to clear the area for the apse extension. The spoil dug out for the foundations forms the large mound in the churchyard, placed there to keep any remains on consecrated ground. In the northwest corner is the Elkins tomb, grade II listed. Other chest tombs mark the burials of eminent Guildford families. Particularly notable in the churchyard is a statue to Geoffrey Brooke Parnell and the men who fell with him at High Wood in July 1916; the winged crusader-like figure was designed by his sister Edith Farmiloe.

Recently an area in the southeast corner was dedicated as a memorial garden for the interment of ashes.