

Lewis Carroll & St. Mary's

Lewis Carroll's real name was Charles Dodgson. When his father died in 1868 Charles became head of the family, and moved them from Yorkshire to The Chestnuts, Castle Hill, Guildford. This was in St. Mary's parish and the family went to church there regularly. Their father was a vicar, and Charles was probably expected to take holy orders. He went to the University of Oxford, did very well at mathematics and stayed on as a lecturer at Christ Church. The surviving medieval rules at Oxford meant that he had to take holy orders, and could not marry if he stayed in the college.

However, he did not want to be a priest, but eventually took the first step of being ordained deacon. He never married, possibly because of an unhappy love-affair.

He agonised over the decision about becoming a priest. His stammer may have affected his decision. It was worst when reading aloud, so he preached without notes, just having a list of the main points. None of his sermons survive, but as he was an excellent story teller and a logical thinker he could probably preach very well. One of the choir boys at St. Mary's, Amos Chalcraft, did not agree: he found the sermons very long. They normally lasted about 20 to 30 minutes.

He went to the college chapel every day and to church twice on Sundays, and read morning prayer to the family when he was at home in Guildford.

He became a deacon in December 1861, but did not preach a sermon until June 1862, when a friend asked him to. He did not preach between 1867 and January 1887, when the rector of Holy Trinity and St. Mary's persuaded him to preach at St. Mary's. He took the headings of the sermon but did not look at them. He preached eleven times in all, over the next ten years, usually at the 11 o'clock service. The current pulpit was given in 1889: about half of Dodgson's sermons were preached from it. He occasionally helped at communion services.



Guildford was a second home to him. He often visited and had many friends here. *Alice in Wonderland* was published before he moved to Guildford, but he wrote some of *Through the Looking-Glass* here, and thought of the last line of *The Hunting of the Snark* while walking here.

He died at Guildford in January 1898, aged nearly 66. His funeral was held in St. Mary's and he was buried in the Mount Cemetery.

Guildford Museum has a display about Lewis Carroll.