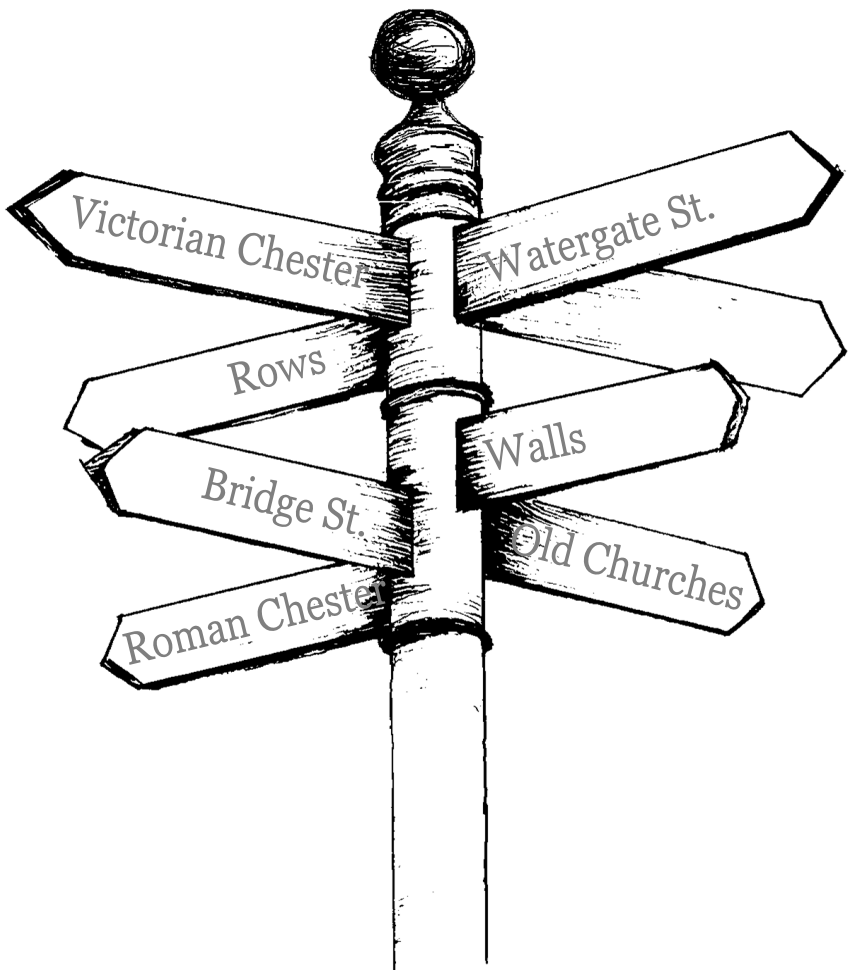


The Walls

Chester

Our Guide



Visitor Information Centre Team

“Our series of friendly Guides written and illustrated during lockdown by the team here at the Visitor Information Centre to give you a warm welcome to our much-loved City of Chester”.

The thriving historic city of Chester is home to the longest and most complete city walls in Britain. Originally built for protection, they are now one of the city's major visitor attractions.

This guide will help you explore the walls and discover more about their long & colourful history, which stretches back almost 2000 years!

Chester was originally the Roman fortress of Deva and the first walls were originally constructed to defend the site. The early timber & earth structure was soon rebuilt in stone and much of the northern and eastern circuit of the walls still follows the line of the Roman fortress wall. The city was refortified by the Anglo-Saxon Queen **Aethelflaed** in the early 10th century, as a stronghold against Viking raids. Following the Norman conquest of England, the walls were extended to the west and south to their present line, giving protection to what had become one of the most important medieval ports on the west coast.

Sitting on the Welsh border, Chester was part of England's very own medieval 'Wild West'. Raids and rebellions meant the townsfolk relied on the walls to protect them. The severed heads of rebels were displayed on spikes at the East Gate as a grim warning.

In the 1640s, the English Civil War saw Chester under siege. The walls offered protection but suffered badly - along with the population.

By the 18th Century, many English towns and cities were pulling down their defences. Luckily for us, a different fate awaited Chester's walls. Large paving stones were laid on the walkways and the walls became a place to stroll. It became very fashionable to walk the walls ...a place to see and to be seen.

The walls now form a pleasant two-mile (3km) walk. It is a great way to see Chester and get an overview of what the city has to offer. Walking around the walls you may find yourself pulled in different directions to see Chester's many gems ...there are steps leading off

the walls to allow you to do this. Note how the steps dip in the middle...worn away due to all the people walking them over the centuries.

Now you know a little of about the walls, it's your turn to experience them for yourself. Everyone has their favourite part and favourite view.

Please note the ancient walls are made of local red sandstone and can be costly and tricky to maintain and sometimes sections may be closed.

The Walk

The walls are only a few minutes' walk from the **Visitor Information Centre**.

As you walk up Northgate Street, you will see the stone arch ahead. This is the **North Gate** to the city. Climb the stone steps on the right-hand side of the gate and at the top turn right you are now walking on the walls.

You will see **Rufus Court** on right ...a small courtyard accessed from the walls with independent shops, cafes, and bars while on your left, if you peer over the wall, is the **Shropshire Union Canal**.

Ahead, at the Northeast corner of the wall, is King Charles Tower. It is from here that Charles I is said to have watched the defeat of his army in 1645 at the nearby battle of Rowton Moor. The tower is also known as Phoenix Tower and above the doorway to the lower tower chamber is a carved phoenix. This dates to 1613 and is the

emblem of the City Guild of Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers who once occupied the tower as a meeting place.

On your right is the Dean's Field, once the site of Roman barracks, while ahead lies the Cathedral. Where the walls meet the Georgian terraced Abbey Street is the Kaleyards gate, a small 13th century gate built into the wall to allow monks to access their vegetable garden that lay just beyond the walls.



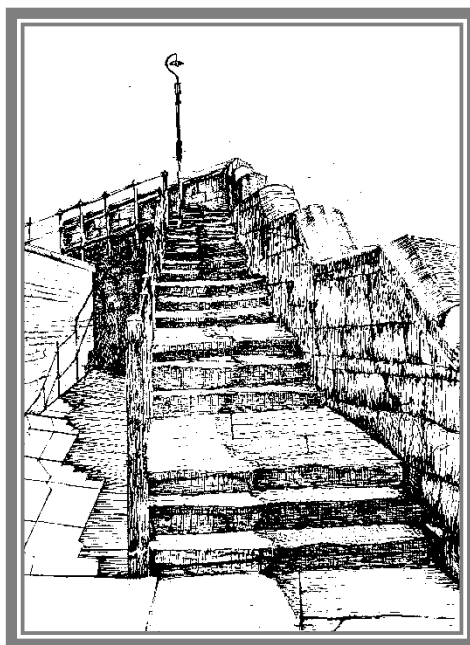
You will now have an impressive view of Chester Cathedral on your right, while a little further ahead is the bell tower. The cathedral was a medieval Benedictine Abbey before becoming a cathedral in 1541.

Walk a little further and up the short flight of steps and you are now under the famous Eastgate Clock. Take in the wonderful view of Eastgate Street, Chester's principal shopping street. The clock itself was erected in 1899 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria two years earlier. It is said to be the second most photographed clock in England (after Big Ben). The site of the East Gate was once the entrance to the Roman fortress.

Continue along the walls until you reach the next tower. This is the Newgate, constructed in the 1930s, replacing the earlier gateway once known as Wolfgate (which still exists a short distance away). There is space here to walk around freely and admire the view of the Roman amphitheatre, with St John's Church, Chester's original Norman cathedral, beyond. Many kids also love this part of the wall as they feel like proper soldiers with the Newgate's towers and arrow slits. Close by is a grey 1960s multi storey car park, which lies on the site of the former Lions Brewery and the brewery's old lion now sits atop the car park 'tower'.

Walk a little further and look over the wall on the left, where you will see the Roman Gardens, the location of a major breach in the wall during the civil war siege. The different stonework where the hole was hastily filled in can still be seen from the gardens. On your right are the six remaining houses from the picturesque 'Nine Houses', 17th century timber framed alms houses. Parish boundary markers can be found on the front of the nine houses, indicating where St Olave's Parish (SOP) and St Michael's Parish (SMP) meet.

Pass the neat 19th century red brick terraced houses on your right and you will shortly come to the Wishing Steps. Built in 1785 to join two levels of the walls, there are six flights of steps consisting of three steps each. Local folklore says that if you start at the bottom of the steps, take a single breath then run up to the top, back down again and back up to the top



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without taking another breath you can make a wish and it will come true!

On your left opens up a beautiful view of the 'Groves', Chester's riverside promenade. Queens Park Suspension Bridge dates from 1922 but replaced a similar Victorian structure. The Groves are well worth exploring and are the starting point for boat trips along the River Dee.

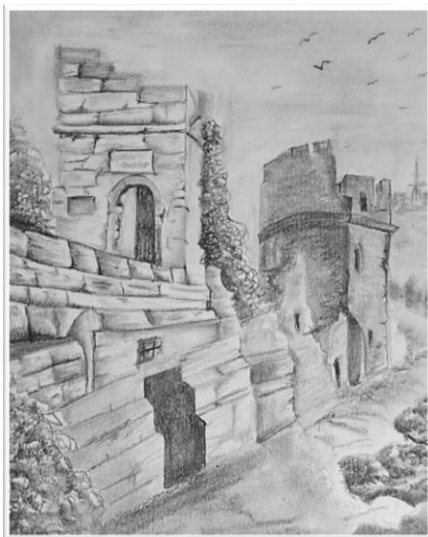
As the walls run parallel to the river, you will see the ancient Norman weir and the Old Dee Bridge. Until 1832 this was the main route from the city into North Wales and is still used by cars and pedestrians today. The bridge you see dates from the 14th century but stands where its Roman predecessor once stood.



At the city end of the Old Dee Bridge lies the Bridgegate, which guards the southern entrance to into Chester. The medieval gateway was replaced in 1782 by the present gateway. Just through

the gate is Lower Bridge Street, home to several timber framed old inns and once Chester's Viking quarter.

Beyond the Bridgegate, the walls are at street level and the former Cheshire County Hall (now part of the University of Chester) lies on your right. Continue and you will see Chester Castle. The Norman castle was originally built by William the Conqueror's nephew Hugh d'Averanches also known as Hugh Lupus, who was the first Earl of Chester. Within the castle complex there are still remaining parts of the medieval castle together with the early 19th century Greek revival buildings designed by Thomas Harrison.



On your left, spanning the river is the Grosvenor Bridge. Opened in 1833, it was for a while the longest single span in the world and provided a new route into Wales.

Cross Grosvenor Road by the entrance to the bridge. The walls continue, running alongside the racecourse. The site occupies an area known as the Roodee and opened in 1539, making it the world's oldest operational racecourse. It stands on the site of the old Roman harbour and remnants of the quay can be seen today, forming part of the walls.

You will soon come to the Watergate, so named because the river Dee once reached the gate, allowing ships to dock and unload in what was once a busy medieval trading port.

The Chester - Holyhead railway line cuts through the northwest corner of the wall a little before two ancient towers appear on your

left. The splendidly named Bonewaldesthorne's Tower was first recorded in 1249 and eventually became a gatehouse to the nearby Water Tower. The 14th century Water Tower stands outside the northwest corner of the walls, joining Bonewaldesthorne's Tower by a spur wall and once stood in the river, protecting the port. However, due to the silting up of the river it now stands firmly on dry land. It's fascinating to think that the water once lapped at the base of this part of the walls.

The walls turn a sharp right and to your left you can see the canal basin.

The walls now rise above the inner ring road at St Martin's Gate, which, along with the Newgate, is one of two 20th century gates in the wall.

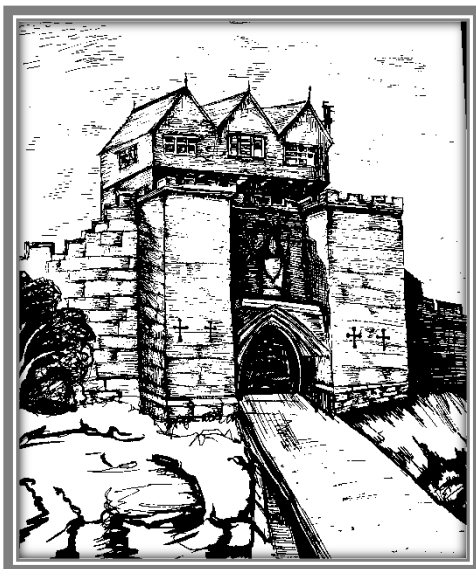
On your left is Pemberton's Parlour. Named after a former Mayor of Chester, it was converted into a semi-circular tower in the early 18th century after once being a round watchtower known as the Goblin Tower.

A little further ahead is Morgan's Mount, named after a Captain in King Charles I army. Steps will take you to the top, where Capt. Morgan is reputed to have commanded a battery of cannon during the English Civil War siege of Chester.

Keep walking and you will soon be back by the North Gate where our walk began. The old North Gate once hosted a notorious gaol.

Congratulations! you have completed the world-famous Chester City walls.

Why not pop into to the Visitor Information Centre at the Town Hall and reward yourself, friends, or family with an 'I walked the walls' exclusive T-shirt or chocolate bar.





Northgate

Northgate St.

Cathedral



Eastgate St.

Eastgate

Watergate St.

The Cross

Bridge St.

Newgate

Watergate

Bridge Gate

River Dee

River Dee

Price £1



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