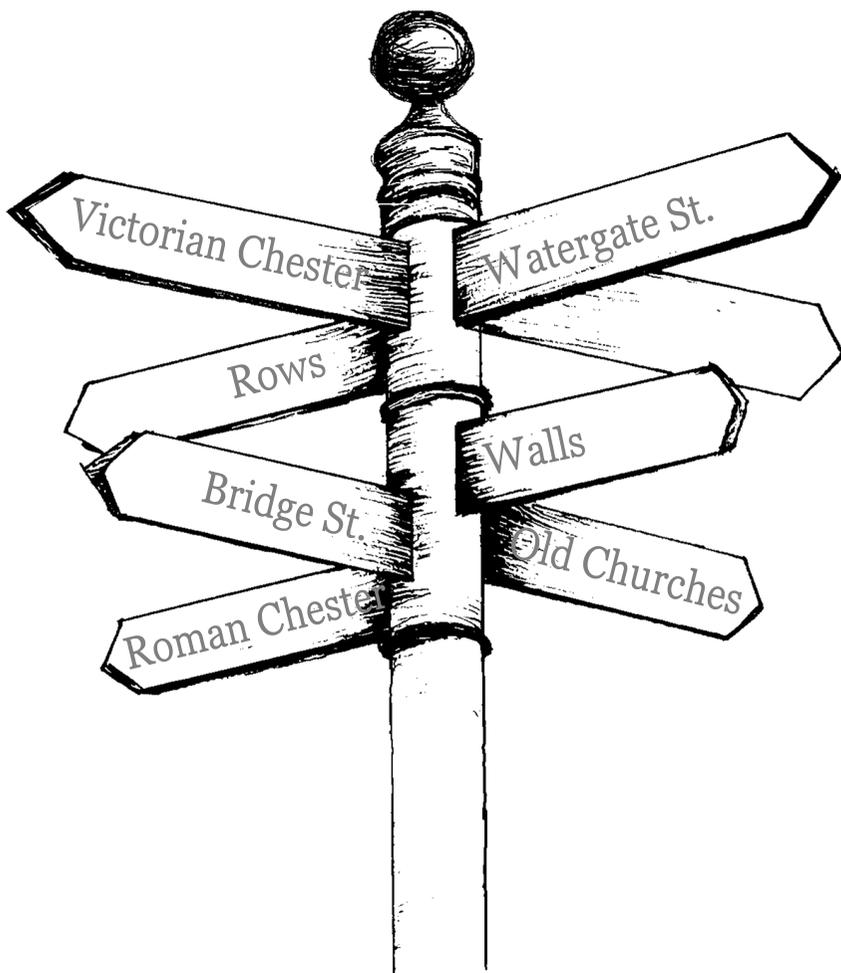


Watergate Street

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”.



This guide is to help you to explore and enjoy Watergate Street, one of Chester's most picturesque streets. There is plenty to see and do while absorbing its rich history and we will cover just some of the highlights that we think you may enjoy.

Watergate street heads west from the High Cross, offering views of the Clwydian range in North Wales as it continues down to the Water Gate itself.

The street takes its name from the period when the city was a thriving medieval port as it leads to the old port of Chester and it was once home to many of the city's wealthy merchants. Watergate Street is also one of Chester's ancient Roman streets, forming part of what the Romans knew as 'via Principalis', the Latin name for the road running east to west through the fortress.

By day...

Watergate Street is in the heart of Chester. It is a quaint pedestrian street with a cobbled surface. The cafes and bars often have tables and chairs spilling onto the pavement creating a lovely atmosphere. It makes it the perfect place to stop sit and enjoy a cuppa, watching the world go by and simply enjoying your surroundings. Take your time to look up and appreciate buildings and notice the different architecture through the ages. Watergate Street features a key area of Chester's famous and unique Rows. These are galleries above street level that are a hive of activity. Behind these little doors are all sorts of independent shops, cafes, and other businesses. Watergate Street hosts an eclectic mix of shops, where you can buy anything from antiques or a piece of art to something sweet - a perfect gift or memento of your time in Chester.

There are several ways to access the Rows. Numerous short, narrow staircases hidden between shop fronts will take you up to them. The Row on the north side of the street is often low beamed, so watch your head!

Don't forget while walking along the Row to take a peek out of the balconies and admire the street from a different angle. Being higher

up, it's also a great way to take in the architecture on the opposite side of the street.

By night....

In the evening Watergate Street takes on a life of its own. The many restaurants, pubs and bars at both street and row level create a fabulous and unique atmosphere and the street buzzes with music, fun and laughter! From cosy restaurants serving food from around the globe to trendy bars and traditional pubs, many housed in under crofts or other unusual buildings. What better way to spend an evening in the city? There is even a secret bar on this street behind a hidden shop front ...can you spot it?

The spirit of Watergate Street....

As with much of Chester, Watergate Street ghosts of the past. Here are just a few to look out for...

A phantom sailor is said to wander the street. He must have been around for a while as ocean going ships visiting the port by had declined by the 18th century. Many people have tried to engage him, but he disappears when spoken to directly.

Another sailor is said to look out from the upper windows of Leche House, while Stanley Palace has witnessed so much paranormal activity that many ghosts' hunters flock there.

So, let's take a walk...

Starting at the Cross, we'll head down the street, taking a look at some of the highlights the left (south) side of Watergate Street. The walk is at street level, but don't forget to pop up to Row level to explore.

Gods Providence House

This timber framed house is famed for its inscription at Row level reading:

"Gods providence is mine inheritance"

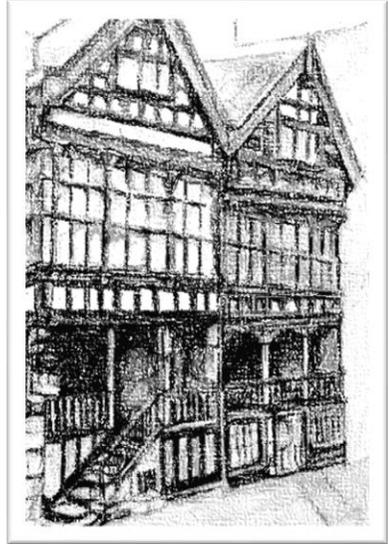
It is said to be thanks for keeping everyone safe from the pestilence of 1647-8. There is a story that the lower part of the house was a stable for cattle and that this in some way prevented the resident family upstairs from catching the plague. The house was built in 1652 and rebuilt, using some of the original timbers, in 1862.

Leche House

A half-timbered medieval town house considered the best preserved in Chester. The building has features from many periods in its long history, from a medieval great hall to 18th century graffiti. Its impressive 14th century undercroft is now the home of the Weasel & the Bug toy shop.

Bishop Lloyd's House

Also known as Bishop Lloyds Palace, this impressive house started life as two separate houses and has seen numerous alterations, including a restoration at the end of the 19th century. The facade is divided into square panels filled with intricately carved heraldic symbols and religious history. Welshman George Lloyd served as Bishop of Chester from 1605 until his death 10 years later.



The Old Custom House Inn

Now a cosy public house it comprises town houses combined, with the oldest dating back to the 17th century. The inn takes its name from its position opposite the port of Chester's custom house. Original features include a stone fireplace, while the stone undercrofts are now used as the pub's beer cellars.

The Street is now cut in two by the 1960s inner ring road, with the lower part now often mistakenly known as Lower Watergate Street. Cross the ring road by the crossing on the left (outside 'Bar Lounge') and on your left is the magnificent Stanley Palace.

Stanley Palace

This Elizabethan house dates to 1591. Built as a town house for Chester MP Sir Peter Warburton, it boasts many interesting features from its rich history. It has at various times also served as a museum, school, and apartments. Much of the house was at one time hidden from view by 18th century cottages, which were demolished during restoration of the house in 1935.



The Water Gate

If you were to step through the gate during the medieval period, you would find yourself in a bustling port, once one of the most important on the west coast. The gate was the main point of entry into the city for goods landing at the quayside. The present gate dates from 1788 and just beyond now stands 'The Roodee', the site of Chester Racecourse, which dates back to 1539 and sits on land that appeared as the meandering River Dee altered its course.

Retrace your steps, crossing back across the inner ring road and let's take a look at some of the buildings on the left (north side) of the street.

The Old Custom House building

The first building you will come across and not to be confused with Ye Olde Custom House pub opposite, this building originally dates from 1633 but alterations carried out in 1868 give it more of a Victorian feel.

You are now standing approximately on the site of the western entrance to the Roman fortress of Deva.

Guildhall – Holy Trinity Church

Next to the Custom House building stands the former Holy Trinity church, with its iconic red sandstone walls. There has been a church on the site since at least the 12th century, but the present building,

designed by local architect James Harrison, was built between 1865 and 1869.

In 1963 the now redundant church became the Guildhall of the Freemen & Guilds of the City of Chester. The building is now privately owned and is a popular bar & nightspot, but there have been trade guilds in Chester for over 800 years and 23 companies are represented in the guildhall.

Booth Mansion

This impressive house, the largest house in Watergate Street, dates from 1700 and was built for George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington. The brick frontage is angled slightly so it could be better seen from Chester Cross. This encroachment onto the street saw the Earl fined £10, but the architect retained the Row, whereas others had enclosed them. Peak behind the facade though land you will see numerous features of two medieval town houses.

St Peters

Lying where Chester's four main ancient streets come together, this medieval church was founded in 907 and has seen many alterations throughout its long history. Outside the church, facing Bridge Street, once stood the 'Pentice', a timber structure that served as a forerunner of the Town Hall.

Our walk ends here at the Cross, right in the heart of Chester, where in the summer months the Town Crier shouts his proclamations. The Row by the Queen Victoria pub, next to St Peters, is a great vantage spot to watch the drama unfold.



VIC Team

Price £1



@Chester01244

welcome@chestervic.co.uk

www.visitcheshire.com

Tel: 01244405340

VIC Team