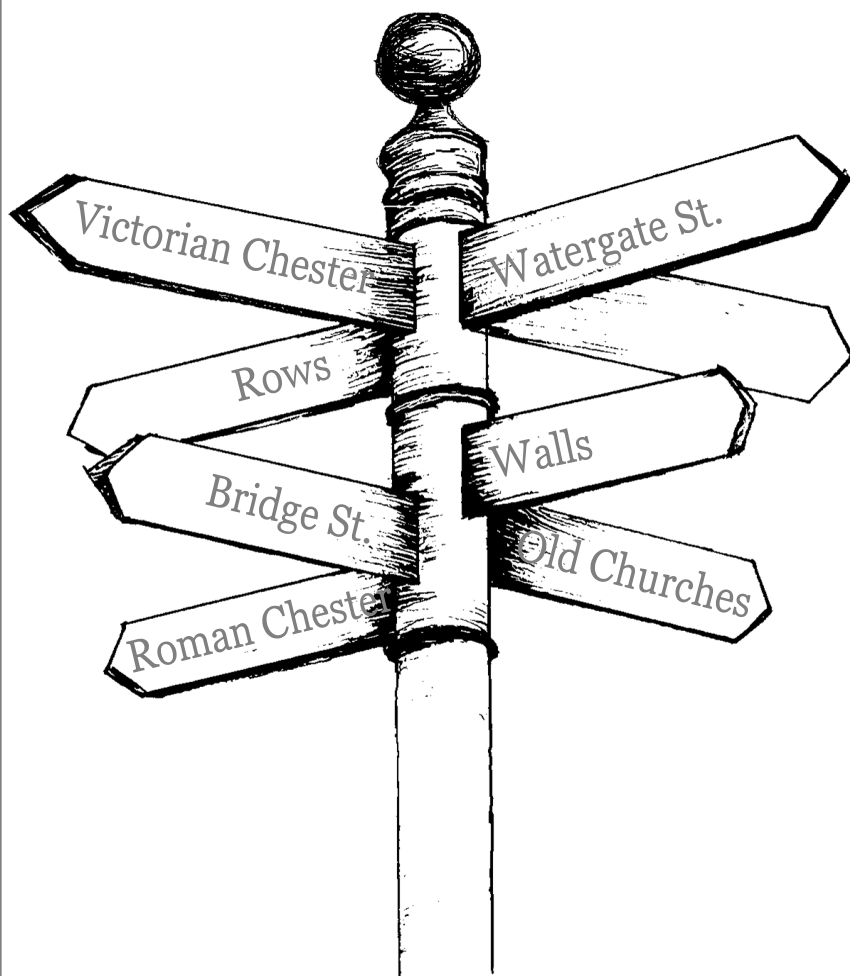


Victorian Chester

Chester

Our Guide



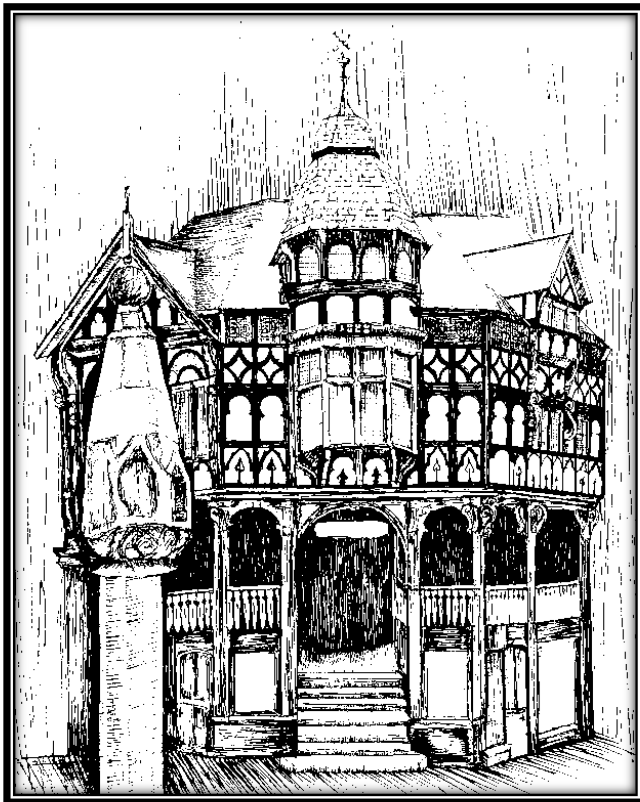
Visitor Information Centre Team

“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”.

VIC Team

What the Dickens! It's a trail around Victorian Chester – or it's not all Black & White (although a lot of it is)

Chester's famous black and white buildings attract visitors from across the world. But take a closer look. What at first appears to be a medieval or Tudor building may well be Victorian... Chester's half-timbered revival began in the 1850s and carried on through into the early 20th century. There are of course superb examples of genuine 16th and 17th century town houses on the city's main streets (notably Watergate Street and Lower Bridge Street), but much of Chester's present-day appearance owes itself to Victorian enthusiasm for the picturesque. This trail will help guide you through this fascinating and perhaps often overlooked chapter in the city's rich history.



VIC Team

Let us set the scene!

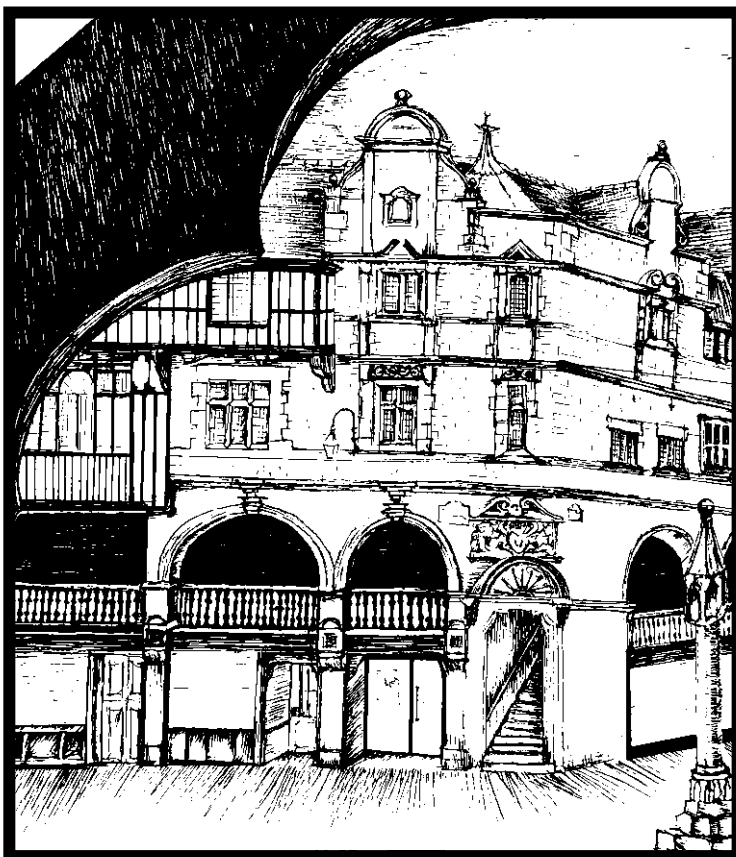
While Chester continued to grow throughout the 19th century, the rate of growth was a fraction of that of the industrial towns and cities just to the north in Lancashire. Places like Liverpool and Manchester changed beyond all recognition during the period, but Chester, although important industries did develop, saw itself become a place for retail, leisure and services. Like the famous resorts of the British seaside, Chester became a place to visit for pleasure.

Start your walk at the Visitor Information Centre (VIC)

On leaving the VIC, head to the statue in the middle of the Town Hall square. You are now standing on the site of the Exchange, the Town Hall's predecessor, which burned down in 1862, a little over 160 years after it was erected. Stroll towards the Cathedral and down St Werburgh Street, keeping the Cathedral on your left. As the road turns right, look at the buildings on your left, numbers 2 – 18 St Werburgh Street. These were designed by John Douglas, one of the leading architects of Victorian Chester and are a fine example of the black & white revival that came to dominate the city's architecture.

At the bottom of the street, turn right onto Eastgate Street, the city's principal shopping street. This street is crammed with wonderful 19th & early 20th century facades, many featuring black and white revival. Eastgate Street is one of the four streets that feature Chester's famous 'Rows', the galleried shops that line the streets that meet at the High Cross. First noted in the 13th century, the Rows' origins remain the subject of much debate.

Continue along Eastgate Street to the High Cross. The buildings which lie on either side of the entrance to Bridge Street are much photographed examples of Chester's late Victorian architecture. Both are the work of Thomas Meakin Lockwood, another of the city's prominent (and prolific) architects.



Turn left into Bridge Street, another street that is home to the Rows.

Coming up on your left are the imposing St Michael's Buildings, part of which form an Edwardian arcade that is now the western entrance to the Grosvenor Shopping Centre. Designed by the sons of TM Lockwood, the original tiled facade so upset the locals that it was almost immediately replaced by the present black and white structure. The windows of street level shops either side of the steps still offer a glimpse of the original tiled facade.



When you reach the bottom of Bridge Street, turn right into Grosvenor Street and use the Pedestrian crossing to cross the ring road to the Falcon pub (the large black & white building opposite). Grosvenor Street was built in 1829 and was the first road to make a major alteration to Chester's ancient street plan. The street leads (via Grosvenor Road) to Grosvenor Bridge, which supplanted the Old Dee Bridge as the main route into North Wales.

Continue walking away from the city centre, keeping the Saddle Inn on your left. Next to the Saddle Inn is the Grosvenor Museum. Another TM Lockwood design it was opened in 1886 and built at the expense of the Duke of Westminster. The museum features a Victorian parlour room among its exhibits. Adjoining the museum are former bank buildings that have more recently been occupied by a restaurant.

As you approach the roundabout, turn left into Castle Street, passing the Cheshire Military Museum on your right. This is part

of the Castle area, which was heavily reshaped in the neoclassical style by Thomas Harrison in the late 18th/early 19th century.

Take the turning to the right, called St Mary's Hill. On your right is the former church of St Mary on the Hill, with its extensive Victorian restoration work. Take extra care here – this is one of England's steepest streets.

At foot of the hill, turn left into Shipgate Street, with its Georgian houses on the left. It's only a short street and you will soon meet Lower Bridge Street, once the principal route into North Wales from Chester and a thousand years ago the home of Chester's Viking settlers. Opposite is the Cross Keys pub, one of numerous watering holes on Lower Bridge Street. Unlike its half-timbered neighbours though, this one revels in its Victorian style.

Cross the road to the Cross Keys and continue along Duke Street, which turns left at the city walls to become Park Street. On the left are the neat mid-19th century terraces of Albion Place and Albion Street. (The latter is well worth the very short detour along to view the 1869 Drill Hall). Continue along Park Street, keeping The Albion pub to your left.

Coming up on your left are the c1650 'Nine houses' (of which six remain), next to which is a building from 1881, providing another interesting contrast between late 19th century black & white revival and the architecture that inspired it.

Continue to the end of Park Street and turn right and walk through the 1938 Newgate, one of two 20th century entrances in the walls (St Martin's gate, built in 1966, is the other).

Continue walking past The Roman Gardens, the entrance to Souters Lane and the Roman Amphitheatre (you get two options by the amphitheatre. Take either the pavement around the perimeter or the raised walkway across the centre). To your right, and built over the southern part of the amphitheatre, is Dee House. Once a Georgian town house, the various 19th & 20th century extensions saw it house a convent school. Now lying

derelict, the future of the building has been the subject of much local debate. A little further ahead is St John's Church, Chester's first Cathedral. Much of the exterior is Victorian, dating from the restoration of 1859 – 1866.

On the opposite side of the road to St John's are the seven cottages of Lumley Terrace and the red brick former Grosvenor St John's School (which some visitors to the city may recall as one-time home to the British Heritage Exhibition and later the Chester Visitor Centre).

Keeping St John's Church to your right, you will now see the western entrance to Grosvenor Park.

If you have time, any enthusiast of the Victorian period will find Grosvenor Park is well worth exploring. Opened in 1867, the park was recently restored and retains many of its original features.

Continue along the main road (now called Union Street) and cross the road using the pedestrian crossing opposite the City Baths, another John Douglas design and opened in 1901. Turn right, crossing Bath Street. The road takes a turn to the left, becoming Grosvenor Park Road. Across the road on your right, you will see the half-timbered Park Lodge, the large terraces built 1879/80 and Zion Chapel, while on your left is St Werburgh's RC Church, opened in 1875. All are the work of John Douglas. In fact, so many of the buildings in this part of Chester were built by him that the area became known as 'Douglasville'.

Keeping St Werburgh's on your left, you will shortly arrive at the traffic junction known as the Bars, once the site of defences guarding the eastern approach to the city.

You may wish to take a detour along City Road (on the opposite side of the Bars) to take in one of Chester's early Victorian marvels, the Railway Station, which was opened in 1848. City Road

was laid out the 1860s and other noted 19th century features include the English Presbyterian Church of Wales and the Queen Hotel, which lie at opposite ends of the road.

Turn Left into Foregate Street and walk towards the famous Eastgate Clock, which you will catch sight off in the distance. Your route will take you past numerous late 19th century buildings, which include Parkers Buildings on your right (next to Foregate News), another John Douglas creation. The 'New' Blossoms Hotel (built in 1896 by TM Lockwood and later extended by his son, WT Lockwood) lies on the corner of St John's Street, while opposite, on the corner of Frodsham Street, is the Royal Bank of Scotland building. This dates from 1921 and illustrates just how long the black & white revival style lasted in Chester.



VIC Team

As you approach the Eastgate itself, the buildings on the left are TM Lockwood's black & white 1895 'Old Bank Buildings'.

You are now stood by the famous Eastgate Clock. Claimed to be the second most photographed clock in England after Big Ben, the clock was erected in 1899 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria two years previously. The clock was designed by non-other than our old friend John Douglas.

Walk through the Eastgate and you will find yourself back on Eastgate Street for the second time. However, it is so full of delights though that no apology is made for taking another look.

As you pass through the Eastgate, the first building on your left is the HSBC building, which features the arms of Wales's historic counties (It was once the North & South Wales Bank). Designed by Douglas, it was once a Gentlemen's Club. Just beyond, and now home to retailer Next, is the four storied building by Charles A. Ewing, erected in 1892.

Opposite is The Grosvenor Hotel, built in the 1860s by TM Penson, who is credited with pioneering the black & white revival style in Chester. Penson sadly died before it was completed, but his younger brother completed the work.

A little further on is the building of the famous Browns of Chester department store, part of which is another Penson design, namely the Gothic Revival 'Crypt Chambers', built in 1858.

On the north side of the street are the premises now occupied by Beaverbrooks, EE and Fat Face, which are the work of TM Lockwood, with later extensions by his sons.

Just before you reach the High Cross again, turn right into Northgate Street. The covered walkway coming up on your left replaced a Row known as Shoemakers Row. Built between 1897 – 1909, it is the work of three architects, including County Architect Henry Beswick, once a pupil of TM Lockwood. James

Strong, a pupil of John Douglas, and Douglas himself complete the trio.

On your right, and now home to Superdrug, is the Music Hall. The building has been a chapel, wool trading hall and theatre. It was extensively remodelled by James Harrison in 1854-5 and played host to Charles Dickens in 1867.

As you enter the area now known as Town Hall Square, dominated by the magnificent Town Hall, take a look to your left at the narrow archway which links the Dublin Packet pub to the fish & chip shop. This is the sole remaining part of the old market hall facade. Much lamented by many locals, the Baroque revival building was erected in 1863, but demolished in 1967.

You are now back at the Visitor Information Centre, housed in Belfast architect William Henry Lynn's magnificent Town Hall. Opened in 1869 by the future King Edward VII, the building takes its inspiration from the medieval Cloth Hall in Ypres, Belgium. A major fire on the first floor in 1898 saw TM Lockwood rebuild the interior of that level. No longer used as an administrative HQ, the Town Hall hosts weddings and events, plus of course Chester's Visitor Information Centre.

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