

Walk 2

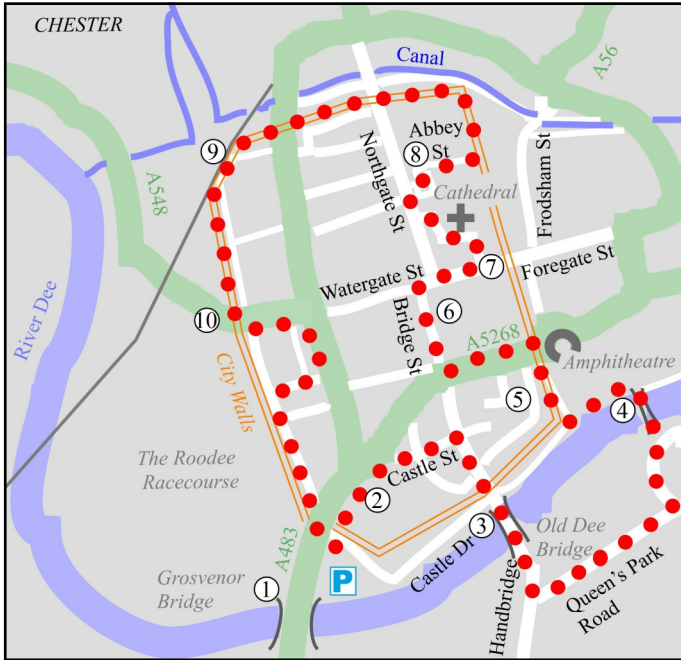
CHESTER



Eastgate Street



What makes an ideal city? For myself its the architecture and history which draws me in but there has to be something extra in its setting to make it special. Chester is my favourite as its 2000 years of development can be seen in a wide variety of buildings, but these are all set within a spectacular city wall surrounded by a river which is an integral part of the landscape.



A circular walk using parts of the city walls with diversions to see some of the old buildings and features which make this such a unique city. A cathedral, castle, bridges, Roman amphitheatre, medieval walls, a racecourse, canal, river, and some magnificent timber framed, brick and stone buildings all within a three mile walk!

Distance: 3 miles approx

Parking: There are numerous car parks all around the city and a park and ride system which is cheaper. I used the Little Roodee pay and display car park off Castle Drive. The walk begins from here.



From the Little Roodee Car Park take a quick look at the bridge over the river.

① **Grosvenor Bridge, CH4 7JT**

This graceful bridge may not astound us today with its size but when it was opened nearly 200 years ago it was the largest masonry arched bridge in the world. Designed by Thomas Harrison and completed in 1833 its huge single span arch is around 230ft wide and it actually carries on under the abutments either side.

Go back into the car park, past the cafe block and up onto Castle Drive where you turn left up to the main road. Go right and walk up a few hundred yards noticing the old castle walls on top of the bank on your right side. Stop just before you reach the roundabout by the Classical style entrance to the castle site.

② *This austere and imposing entrance is termed a propylaea which is a monumental gateway based upon the entrance to the Acropolis. It is the work of Thomas Harrison who won the competition to design the new county buildings on the site of the old Medieval castle in 1785, although this Greek Revival entrance was not completed until 1822.*



Behind it is Harrison's Shire Hall and other buildings which originally contained the courts, barracks and armoury. Only fragments survive of the earlier castle founded on the site by William the Conqueror, the most prominent of which is Agricola's Tower.

From here carry on up the right side of the roundabout and take your first right into Castle Street. The Victorian Tudor style building with the clock tower on your left was an old bank dating from 1847. Walk down Castle Street.



This pair of houses along Castle St at first glance look of a similar date but show the subtle differences between early and late Georgian houses. The one on the right is from the early 18th century with the sash windows having thick frames set flush with the outside of the wall and horizontal bands marking each floor. The one on the left is typical of a late 18th century house with the window frames now recessed behind the brick wall as a fire prevention measure.



The doorway on the right hand building is surrounded by a frame which unlike most is highest on the inner edge and recedes outwards. This is known as Bolection moulding and is very distinctive of the late 17th and early 18th century.



At the end of Castle Street turn right down Lower Bridge Street, under the city walls and onto the Old Dee Bridge.



These two buildings above are excellent examples of late 17th and early 18th century houses with the deep cornice at the top and prominent quoins (corner stones).

③ **The Old Dee Bridge, CH4 7JE.**

This old medieval stone bridge with its gothic pointed arches dates from the 14th century. The wider segmental arch on the right of this photo is a later rebuilding. The bridge was also widened along one side in 1826, a common practise to allow for increased road traffic. A tower once stood on the right of this view, the wider pier here marks its base. The building on the far left of this view (nearest the city end of the bridge) is an early hydroelectric power station which operated from 1913-39 on the site of the old Dee Mill.



Once across the Old Dee Bridge head up into Handbridge and take the second left into Queens Park Drive just in front of the garage. Follow it past the school and then turn left into Victoria Crescent and follow it round until you reach the entrance to the suspension bridge on your left.

④ **Queen's Park Suspension Bridge, CH1 1SD**

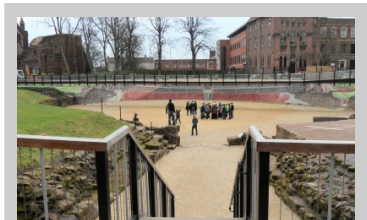
The Groves on the north bank of the River Dee is a beautiful spot with tree lined terraces and boat rides making this a busy meeting place. This fine bow fronted late 18th century house stands close to the end of the suspension bridge.



Once across the suspension bridge turn left and walk along The Groves past the mini roundabout and restaurant. You can either turn right at the bottom of the city walls and follow the path up through the Roman Gardens to the Amphitheatre or as I did carry on a few yards and then go up the steps onto the wall. Turn right and follow the walls up to Newgate.

⑤ **Albion Place and Street, CH1 1RN.**

Before you reach Newgate take a look to your left at Albion Place and Street, two well preserved rows of Victorian houses complete with their old yards and outside privies. The old corner pub is still open too.



The Amphitheatre is a rare glimpse of Roman life in the centre of a modern city. Take a look when you walk down the steps from Newgate.

From Newgate walk up Pepper Street (alongside the modern shops) and then turn right up into Bridge Street and the famous Rows. At the top in front of Chester Cross turn right and walk down Eastgate then take your second left turn up St Werburgh Street to the Cathedral.



⑥ The Rows, CH1 1NG.

With a raised gallery and sunken ground floor The Rows are a rare survival of a practise that was more common across Medieval Europe (shops would have been on the lower storey and residential above). However despite the odd glimpse of original 13th century building as in the basement of the Three Arches (top left) most of the exteriors you see today are Victorian or modern. Black and white timber framing was popular in 16th and 17th century Cheshire and was revived from 1850 but on a larger scale with more intricate detailing. It is these later buildings as in the photos above which give Bridge Street and Eastgate their distinctive character.



⑦ Eastgate, CH1 1XP.

The cross roads formed in the centre of Chester dates back to the original Roman fort with some of the medieval gates roughly marking it's entrances founded 2000 years ago. Eastgate is the most attractive of these giving a commanding view of the busy streets below. Its most striking feature is the ornate clock which was erected to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897.



Timber framing was originally lime washed or left in its natural state, the use of a black and white colour scheme was a Cheshire speciality. The Victorians revived its use, making it a national style, although most of it is just cladding on a brick structure. Some of the best carving can be seen along Bridge Street, Eastgate Street and St Werburgh's Street.

⑧ **Chester Cathedral, CH1 2DY**

Originally this was a Benedictine abbey, with Henry VIII making it a cathedral in 1540. Fragments of its Norman origins can be seen here and there but most of what you see on the outside is later Medieval with a large amount of 19th century restoration work. Behind the building is Abbey Square with a fine collection of Georgian houses



Go around the west end of the cathedral and opposite the far end of the mighty Victorian Gothic Town Hall turn right through the arched gateway into the Abbey square.



Chester Cathedral

From the top corner of the Square walk up Abbey Street back to the city walls and turn left onto them. You now walk around the northern half of the walls as they stand high above the canal before heading south again at Water Tower.



As you cross Northgate you can see the former Bluecoat School (above) dating from 1717. (Notice the narrow bridge built when the canal was dug to connect it to the old prison at the rear).

⑨ The tower (right) in the north west tip of the walls stands with a spur of wall and the Water Tower beyond which used to be in the river when Chester was an important harbour before the Dee silted up in the 16th century.



Head south along the walls until you reach Watergate ⑩. I stepped off the wall here and took a short diversion up Watergate St, turned right along Nicholas St and right again down Greyfriars to see some fine Georgian houses (pictured below).



From the footpath at the end of Greyfriars rejoin the wall and continue to the end of The Roodee and you will find the starting point on the other side of the main road.

If you want to find out more details about the city's architecture then look out for the Buildings of England series by Nicholas Pevsner (in this case the Cheshire edition)



If you would like to discover more about Georgian houses, timber framed buildings and bridges then look out for my three books pictured below. They are packed with photos and drawings explaining in an easy to understand manner how they were built, what the different styles were and where you can find some outstanding examples. They are available from Amazon, my publisher's website www.countrysidebooks.co.uk and your local bookshop and are all under £10 each. Go to my website www.trevoryorke.co.uk for more details and to take a look inside.

