

# Chichester Heritage Trails



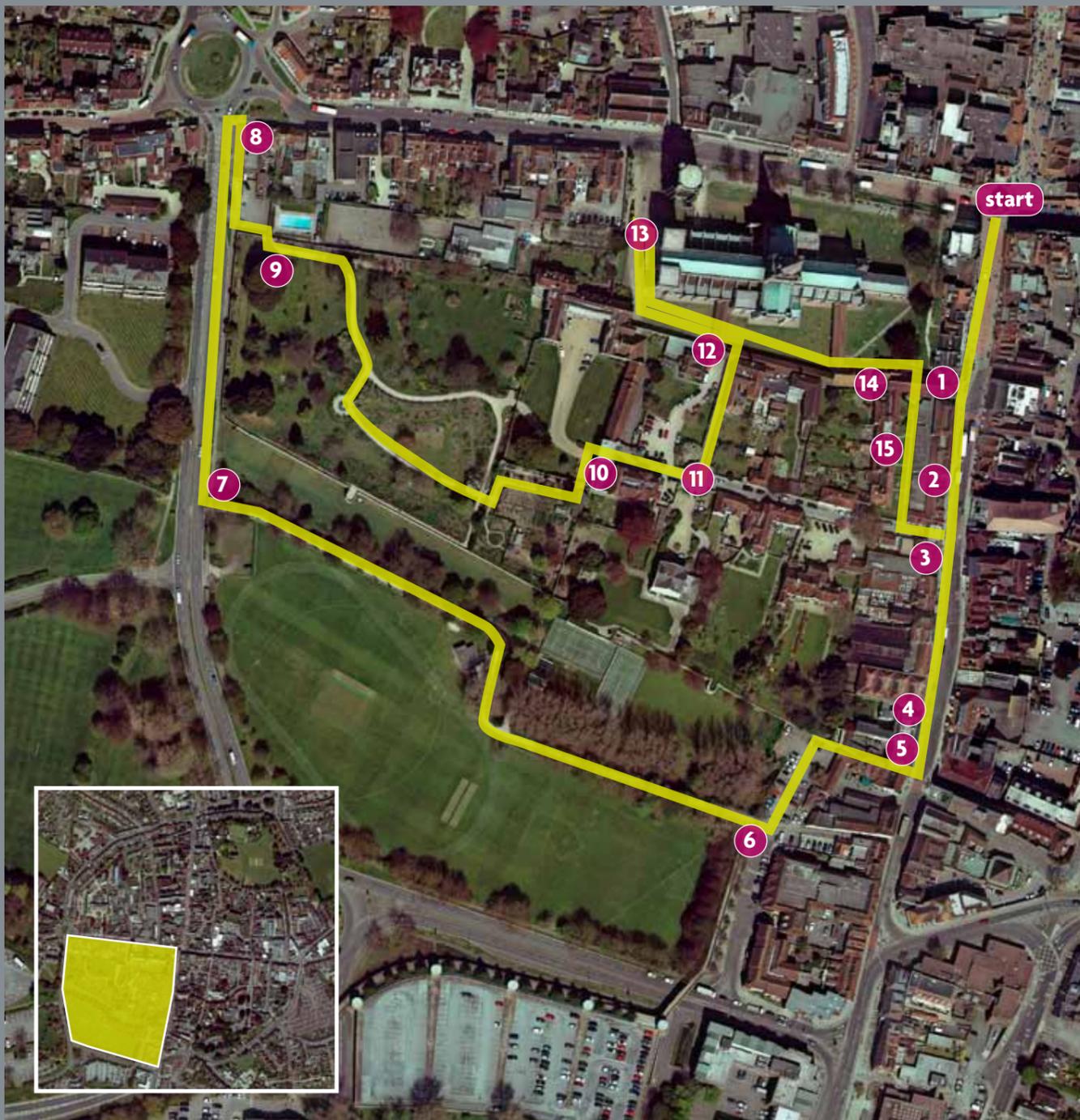
## Trail 4: South-West Quadrant

### General Introduction

Chichester's four principal streets still mainly follow the pattern of the Roman settlement, founded nearly two thousand years ago. The city walls – remarkably intact for an English town – also follow the Roman plan and contain masonry from the original construction. These four city centre walks explore each of Chichester's historic quadrants that are divided by the four principal thoroughfares of North, South, East and West streets. Each quadrant has its own special atmosphere and distinctive history. A great rebuilding from the late seventeenth century replaced or re-fronted timber-framed thatched houses with the characteristic Georgian street scene of brick and stucco buildings that exists today.

### South-West Quadrant

Chichester's south-west quadrant is dominated by the cathedral and the Cathedral Close. Here Edmund Blunden beheld "its own simple character of communicative quietness", while E.V. Lucas observed that, "whatever noise may be in the air you know in your heart that quietude is its true character". Even in 2016 these statements still hold true. As well as the Close and the cloisters of the cathedral, there are also the Bishop's gardens to enjoy. This trail also includes the west side of South Street and the River Lavant. The east side of South Street is included in Trail 3.



### Not So Sacred

The writer and naturalist, William Henry Hudson (1841–1922) was not Chichester's greatest advocate. On the contrary, he complained of the unpleasant smells he encountered in the city (see Stop 6 on this trail) and he thought that the city was far less holy than it should be, the cathedral notwithstanding. But most of all he deplored the drunkenness that he claimed typified many of the residents, fuelled, he explains by "seventy public houses, besides several wine and spirit merchants, and grocers with licences".

Following the publication of Hudson's remarks, the city magistrates closed many of these public houses, but even more have closed within the last twenty years. Today, pub signs have been replaced by those of high class shops and restaurants but in 1899, Hudson found inn signs at every turn –

"...when you enter and walk in the streets, you encounter a strange procession of signs, advancing to meet you, not always singly, but often in twos and threes. They are implements of husbandry, arms of all colours and degrees, castles, railways, telegraphs, globes, ships, tuns, anchors, crosses, and all sorts of objects. Products of the earth too, are there, and signs that have rural associations – barley mows, wheat-sheafs, chestnuts, oaks, bushes, etc., etc. These are followed by creatures, wild and domestic, outlandish and familiar, real and fabulous – the most wonderful happy family on the globe. Behind a lively unicorn, run, trot, and prance a number of horses of all colours, and after these, white harts; then cows, spotted and red, and dogs, and bulls, and lambs, and swans, and eagles and after all a playful dolphin. Nor is this all; to the procession of birds and beasts and fishes, succeed things great and beautiful and magnificent – fountains and rainbows, and the sun in his glory, and the rising sun, and the moon and half moon, and doubtless many stars and constellations; and angels, too, and beautiful thoughts and emotions, good intents, and hope, and I dare say faith and charity to keep her company."

Hudson would presumably be pleased that so few of these inn signs swing today over the streets of the city, although many residents may be less happy and echo Hilaire Belloc (see Trail 1) who wrote, "When you have lost your inns, drown your empty Selves, for you will have lost the last of England".

W. H. Hudson, *Nature in Downland*

### Did you know?

Chichester has 518 listed buildings, 18 of which are Grade 1. Find out more about them on the heritage trails and discover a lot of hidden architectural gems and stories about Chichester's amazing history that will surprise you.

Do you have memories of old Chichester? If so, we would like to hear from you. We are recording memories of the city for future generations. A memory recorded, is history saved.

Please let us know what you think about this trail. We would really like to know which aspects of Chichester's history you would like future trails to cover. Local volunteers, including Chichester University students and pupils at Bishop Luffa School, are currently creating these walks leaflets through the Chichester Heritage Trails project, which is run by the Chichester Society and managed by History People UK.



Chichester City Council

The project has received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £53,000. As part of the project, volunteers are doing archival research and carrying out oral history interviews with residents to recall their memories of Chichester in the past. They have received training in these heritage skills through the project.

Project partners: Bishop Luffa School, Chichester BID, Chichester City Council, Chichester Local History Society, Chichester Society, Chichester Walls Trust, University of Chichester, West Sussex Library Service, West Sussex Record Office.

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You will find a lot more about the Chichester Heritage Trails project and local history on our website and social media sites.

Chichester Heritage Trails

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developing and delivering community heritage projects



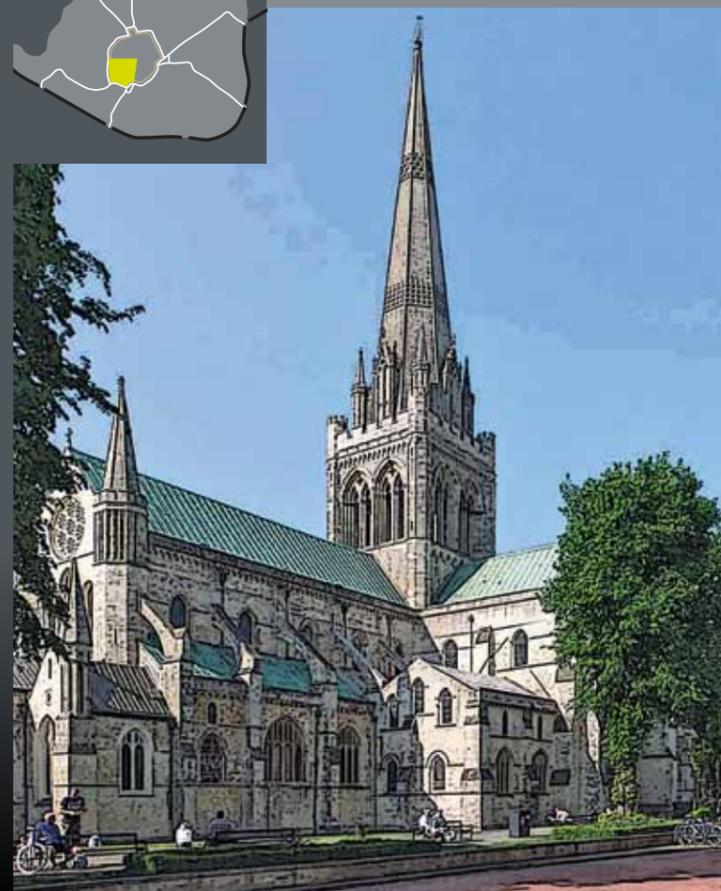
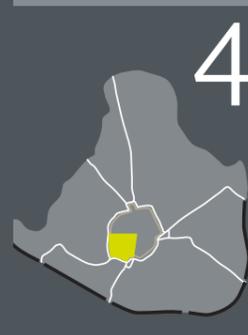
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# Chichester Heritage Trails



## South-West Quadrant





**1** This trail begins at the Market Cross (see Trail 1 for the history of the Cross). Head down South Street. On your right you will soon see the **Crypt of the Vicars' Hall**. The hall itself was built in 1397 for the Vicars' Choral, a body of clergy who performed prayers and masses for wealthy patrons, sometimes in return for the gift of property and land. The crypt itself is believed to be far older, possibly by two hundred years or more, making it one of the oldest buildings in the city. John Keats (see Trail 3) is believed to have been inspired to write his ghostly poem, *The Eve of St Agnes*, following his visits in 1819, while the naturalist and writer, W.H. Hudson, recounted what appears to be a nightmarish vision of The Crypt following his visit in 1899.



**2** South Street was once dominated by small independent shops, catering for the needs of the city. Number **21 South Street** was, before it closed, the last greengrocer's shop in Chichester.



**3** We now come to **Canon Gate** on our right which leads into Canon Lane and the Cathedral Close (which we will visit later in this trail). The gate ensured the security and privacy of the Close and dates back to Tudor times, when there was a nightly curfew. Ecclesiastical courts were held in the room above the gate, as were the 'pie powder' courts held during the annual Sloe Fair every October.

Further on at 28 South Street (Kim's Bookshop) – look for the Blue Plaque to Charles Crocker (1797–1861) poet and contemporary of William Wordsworth

**4** **41 South Street** (St Wilfrid's Hospice charity shop in 2016) was once the home of William Bullaker (1531–1608), who was both a gifted scholar of the English language and a devout Roman Catholic in an era when such beliefs risked prosecution. Bullaker wrote an early English dictionary and several



learned books. His son, John (1574–1627), became a doctor and the de facto leader of Chichester's Roman Catholics. His son, Thomas, became a Franciscan friar (before the dissolution of the monasteries there had been a Franciscan Priory in Chichester – see Trail 3) and was forced to live in exile. On returning to England, he was arrested and subsequently hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1642, the only known resident of Chichester ever to have suffered such a dire fate.



clearly visible in the back bar. H.G. Wells' grandparents ran the inn during the 1830s and his mother, Sarah, was born here. The Fountain stood against the old South Gate in the city walls, which was demolished in 1773 shortly before the building was converted into an inn.

**5** **The Fountain Inn** is one of the last of Chichester's old inns. The city once had over 70 licensed premises. Many smaller beer houses and taverns closed in the early twentieth century but it is in the last twenty years that most of the old inns have closed. The Fountain dates back to 1796. It abuts the city walls and Roman brickwork is

**6** We now make our way behind the Fountain Inn and the adjacent car park towards the playing fields beyond. Currently owned by the Prebendal School, this area was part of the former water meadows of the River Lavant which were known as Westgate Fields. On joining the footpath, look to your right and you will observe the bank of the **River Lavant**. This is a 'winterbourne' stream that usually flows in the winter months. Its course was diverted around the city in Saxon times, both to supply fresh water but also to offer some defence in an era of Viking incursions. In the winter of 1994 the Lavant flooded and Chichester was only spared widespread damage because the Victorian culvert under the city withstood the immense pressure of water pumping through it over a period of weeks. The culvert survived the flooding as much of the water was pumped around it by Green Goddess fire engines. The culverting of the River Lavant took place in 1871–2 with the creation of Market Avenue. Previously the Lavant was little more than an open sewer and the stench on a hot summer's day was said to have been overbearing. A widespread drainage and sewerage improvement programme was undertaken in 1892 and led to the river no longer being used as a sewer. Even when W.H. Hudson visited in 1899 he remarked that "Chichester is not in itself sacred, nor pleasant, nor fragrant to the nostrils". Thankfully such unwanted odours are a thing of the past!



In the 1920s, Chichester's middle class residents still depended on cesspits to store raw sewage. These pits had to be regularly emptied, as Doris le Conte (born 1906) recalled –

*"This awful man used to come round at dead of night. He had a cart and he used to smoke a pipe, and there was a rod at the side where he sat, and there was a lantern hanging on that so that everybody knew he was coming. Then he'd come and empty the cesspit, you see. He went all round everywhere ... I remember looking out of the window and seeing him coming, his lantern swinging about."*



**7** The path takes us to Avenue de Chartres where we turn right. Until the Avenue de Chartres was built in 1964/5, the **city walls** could be approached across fields from the south without encountering roads or buildings. Even today there is a sense of the city's ancient past at this spot. The great bastion of the wall that you see here is one of the few survivors. Chichester is one of only four towns in England to retain their defensive walls largely intact. Originally built by the Romans and refortified in both Saxon and medieval times, the walls remain on their original plan. Although the wall and bastion you see today have been repaired and restored, the core material is Roman. The city fell to the French in 1216 (see Trail 2) and again in 1642 to parliamentary forces during the English Civil War.



masonry of the gate can still be seen abutting the Old Cottage Restaurant. Turning into West Street you will see **The Chichester Inn** (formerly The Castle), one of the city's few remaining traditional pubs, which is said to be haunted by the ghost of a Roman soldier!



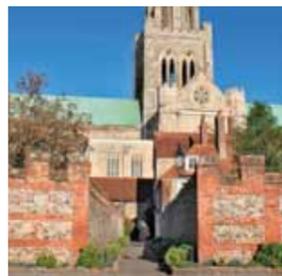
**9** Now retrace your steps back into the Avenue de Chartres and on your left you will see a signpost to the **Bishop's Gardens**. The gardens were once for the private peace and contemplation of the bishop and his guests but are now for public enjoyment as well. There are many fine tree specimens in the gardens, including Ilex (*Quercus ilex*), a Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) known as the 'memory tree' – a species that is believed to have existed 270 million years ago; and Chichester's tallest tree – a Wellingtonia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*).

\* Please note that access to Stops 9–15 may not be available in the evening.

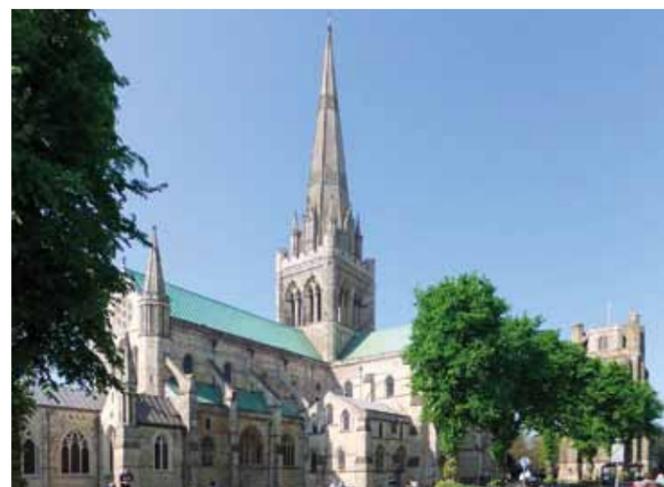


**10** The path through the gardens passes by a Tudor red brick wall with ornamental turret and finally reaches the **Bishop's Palace** parts of which date back to the 16th century. A 12th-century chapel and hall previously stood on the site. The palace and its grounds are not open to the public. Turn right, through the ancient stone gateway, into Canon Lane.

**11** We now turn left into the flower-lined pathway called **St Richard's Walk**. This will bring us into the cathedral cloisters. Turn right. Ahead of you is a grassy quadrangle, known as 'Paradise', which is where members of the cathedral congregation and those living in the Close could choose to be buried into the nineteenth century. Admiral Sir George Murray was buried here in 1819.



**12** Turn left and the massive wall of the **cathedral** will appear on your right. Note the gargoyles. Some are medieval but others were newly placed here in the 1990s when the cathedral was subject to a major restoration and feature officials of the cathedral.



Guides regularly take tours around the cathedral and guidebooks are on sale inside. The building was constructed by the Normans using limestone from the Isle of Wight and from Normandy. The new cathedral replaced a Saxon one that stood at Selsey until 1075. Two great fires in 1114 and 1160 greatly damaged and weakened the new cathedral structure. It was not felt that the building could carry the weight of bells, so a separate bell tower was built of Isle of Wight sandstone. The spire was, however, added in the fifteenth century. During the summer of 1834 the city was hit by six substantial earth tremors. One took place during a Sunday morning service. A local newspaper reported that "some individuals were so much terrified as actually to leave the church and run into the open street". The same newspaper went on to report the general opinion "that this city at some future period will be buried in its own ruins". In February 1861, during restoration works, the cathedral spire collapsed into the nave. Fortunately no one was killed or injured. The spire was subsequently rebuilt to a design by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

**13** The **statue of St Richard** was Chichester's Millennium Project. It is by sculptor Philip Jackson and commemorates one of Chichester's outstanding personalities. Pious and courageous, Richard calmly resisted pressure from both the monarch and the cathedral clergy and thoroughly reformed the corrupt practices he found in the city. His reforms included prohibiting the common practice of clergy keeping concubines and of offering 'sortilege', the irregular practice of using the Bible for divination rituals. So great was his reputation that he was created a saint by the Pope within a few years of his death in 1253. His tomb in the cathedral became a shrine with thousands of pilgrims visiting it each year until it was demolished and removed on the orders of Thomas Cromwell as part of the reformation of religion in 1538.



**14** Now retrace your steps to the cloisters. Walk to the end of this cloister and then bear sharp right down what is known as the '**dark cloister**'. Note the large iron gate which used to be locked at night to ensure that drunks and unruly children did not spoil the spiritual peace of the cloisters.

**15** We come into **Vicars Close**, where the Vicars' Choral would have lived. This is one of the most beautiful and peaceful residential streets in the city. At one time the buildings opposite (now the backs of the shops in South Street) were also residences of the Vicars' Choral. We now return into South Street via Canon Gate. Turn left to return to the Market Cross.

