

# Chichester Heritage Trails



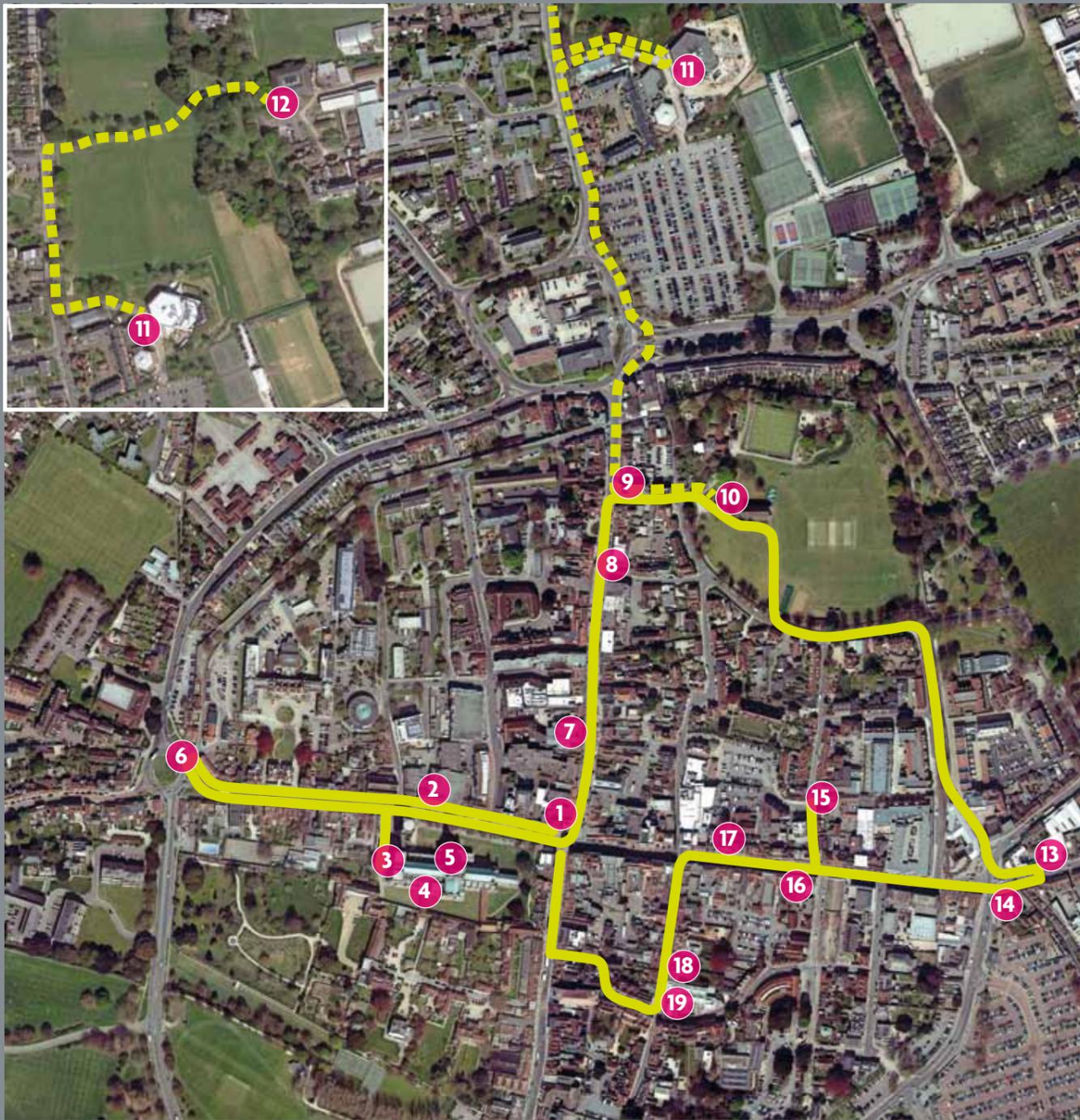
## Trail 8: Notable Chichester people

### Introduction

Over the centuries many talented people have either lived in Chichester or had close connections with the city. Some of them are still household names, while others have become more obscure. This selection seeks to cast the net wide, and include people who made a big impact on the city during their own day and those whose contribution has become more apparent with the passing of time. You will find here writers, artists, philanthropists, and holy men. Hopefully you will be inspired to read further about these diverse but talented personalities.



Market Cross, the starting point for the tour



### Fanny Cornforth

Fanny Cornforth (1835–1909) was the model, muse and mistress of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. After the death of Rossetti's wife, Elizabeth Siddal in 1862, Cornforth moved in as Rossetti's housekeeper. She later fell on hard times and ended her life at Graylingwell Hospital (the West Sussex County Asylum), on the outskirts of Chichester.

Cornforth was born Sarah Cox, the daughter of a Steyning blacksmith. As a young woman she worked in service in Brighton. It is believed that she first met Rossetti in 1858. The circumstances are not clear, but she already had one marriage behind her, to a man named Hughes. She had, for whatever reason, adopted the alias Fanny Cornforth. Rossetti saw in her his feminine ideal: her image appears in some of Rossetti's most famous paintings, including *Lady Lilith*, *Fair Rosamund*, *Bocca Baciata*, and *The Blue Bower*.

By 1876 Rossetti, addicted to drugs and in declining health, was an increasing concern to his family, who stepped in to care for him. The family sought to limit the contact between Rossetti and Cornforth.

In 1879, Cornforth married a publican called John Schott and together they ran a pub called The Rose Tavern in Westminster. Yet Cornforth continued to see Rossetti, accompanying him on a trip to Cumbria in 1881. The following year Rossetti died. Before his death he gave Cornforth a number of his paintings. In the following years she was able to sell these paintings to secure extra income for herself and her husband.

John Schott died in 1891, followed eight years later by his stepson, with whom Cornforth continued to live. She then returned to Sussex. Her sister-in-law through Rossetti, Rosa Villiers, does seem to have given Cornforth limited support, but by 1905, Cornforth was living in the workhouse at Chichester. Two years later, under her married name of Sarah Hughes, she was admitted to the county asylum, where she was diagnosed with dementia. Nothing was known of her background at the time and her later life remained shrouded in mystery until details about her final years in Chichester were discovered in 2015. She died in 1909 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Chichester Cemetery: a sad end for a woman once known to the Pre-Raphaelite artists as 'The Stunner.'

Further information on Fanny Cornforth and some of the other people included in this trail leaflet can be found at West Sussex Record Office and Chichester Library.



### 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.

### Chichester Heritage Trails

- Received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £53,200 in 2016 with contributions of £1,000 each from Chichester City Council and The Chichester Society.
- Was conceived by the Chichester Society, managed by Chris Hare of History People UK and delivered with the support and active contribution of many organisations and individuals, some of whom received training in heritage skills through the project.

### Special thanks to

- 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.
- Project volunteers:** in particular Andrew Berriman, Richard Childs and Alan Green whose knowledge of Chichester's local history has been of immense value. Also Anthony Quail, Bob Wiggins, John Wichers, Richard Beeny, Paula Chatfield, Ellen Cheshire, Mabs Evans, Mary Hand, Madeleine Keene, Geoff King, Sue Millard, Paula Nicholson, Sue Parslow, Geoffrey Redman, Pat Saunders, Lela Tredwell, Wendy Walker, Ross Wilson; and students at Bishop Luffa School and the University of Chichester.

For further information

[www.chichesterheritagetrails.org.uk](http://www.chichesterheritagetrails.org.uk)  
[www.chichestersociety.org.uk](http://www.chichestersociety.org.uk)

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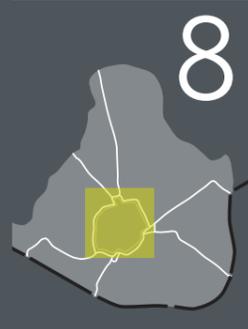


# Chichester Heritage Trails



## Notable people

8



Admiral Sir George Murray by Charles Woolcott around 1815

**1** We start at the Market Cross. **Bishop Storey** (died 1503) endowed the city with this fine market cross in 1501. The bishop wished for the tradesmen of the city to be protected from inclement weather while conducting their business. Chichester's market cross is arguably the most impressive in the country.



**2** From the Market Cross proceed along West Street until you reach the House of Fraser department store on the right. **Oliver Whitby** (1664–1702), an alderman of the city of Chichester, founded his 'Blue Coat' school in 1702, to provide an education for boys from poor families living in the nearby parishes of Wittering and Marden. The school closed in 1949. The present building was completed in 1906. The old school motto *vis et sapientia* (strength and wisdom) can still be seen above the portico.

**3** Cross West Street and head towards the entrance to the cathedral at the west door. The statue of **St Richard** (1197–1253), by the sculptor Philip Jackson, was commissioned as part of Chichester's Millennium Project. Richard was one of Chichester's most significant bishops. He was consecrated in 1245 by the Pope, but the king, Henry III, refused to accept him and barred him from the cathedral and the city of Chichester. For two years he lived in exile in his diocese as a model bishop, performing many miracles; when he was restored in 1247 he set about reforming the behaviour of his clergy and stamping out corrupt practices. 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. In 1538, during the Reformation, it was demolished on the orders of Thomas Cromwell.



**4** Enter the cathedral where the Bell memorial will be found in the south aisle. A more recent bishop of Chichester was **George Bell** (1883–1958) who was bishop from 1929 until 1958. Bell was an early opponent of the Nazi regime in Germany and he did much to help those fleeing persecution, including Jews. During the Second World War he was vocal in his opposition to the 'area bombing' of German cities, claiming that such targeting of civilian areas was against civilised Christian values. Bell was also critical of the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japanese cities. He was a great patron of the arts, believing art at its best had a strong spiritual dimension.



**5** Within the cathedral, in the floor of the north transept, is a memorial containing the ashes of the composer **Gustav Holst** (1874–1934). He was a lifelong friend of George Bell, who invited the composer into Sussex with his Whitsuntide Singers, to perform in the cathedral and the parishes around Chichester. The commemorative stone was dedicated at a special Evensong service in 2009. Holst is today best known for his *Planets Suite*, first performed in 1918.

**6** Exit the cathedral return to West Street and turn left. Continue along West Street until you reach the roundabout at the start of Westgate. To your right on North Walls there is a blue plaque to **Eric Gill**. Gill (1882–1940) was one of the most influential stone carvers, wood engravers and typographers of the 20th century. As a teenager he lived for two years (1897–99) at No. 2, North Walls (now demolished), and studied Art at the Chichester Technical Institute. He soon came to love Chichester, calling it 'the human city, the city of God; here was something as human as home, and as lovely as heaven'. Many of his sculptures can be seen in churches, churchyards, and on public buildings, throughout Britain. Gill released his first typeface, Gill Sans, in 1928. Its remarkably distinctive and clear lettering made it very popular and versatile. It has been adopted throughout the world, and is still in use today. He founded the famous Ditchling School of Artists, in the Downs village just north of Brighton.



**7** Retrace your steps back to the market cross then turn left up North Street. Walk up North Street until you reach number 16 on the left. Today number 16 is W H Smith's and by coincidence, in the eighteenth century the building on this site was the studio of the renowned **Smith Brothers** of Chichester. George (c.1714–1776) and John (c.1717–1764) painted landscapes, while their elder brother, William (c.1707–1764), painted still lifes. George was also known for his pastoral poetry.

**8** Continue up North Street until you reach number 62, on the far corner of St Peter's. This was the home in the seventeenth century of **Marjorie Wilkinson**, who was an early convert to the Society of Friends (Quakers.) It is believed that George Fox, the founder of the movement, addressed a meeting of 'Friends' here in 1655. For many years Marjorie's home became a place of regular Quaker meetings and led to her arrest and prosecution. In 1684 she was imprisoned in Horsham gaol for her Quaker activities.

**9** Continue up North Street. On the northern corner of North Street and Guildhall Street is the Ship Hotel (now known as The Chichester Harbour Hotel.) This grade II\* listed building was built as the home of **Admiral, Sir George Murray**, who had gained fame as a commander with Nelson at

the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801. Nelson wanted Murray to be his second-in-command at Trafalgar, but Murray was in England at the time attending to family business and could not be at the great battle. Like his brother, Richard, who lived opposite him at Fernleigh House, Sir George also became mayor of Chichester. In 1944, General Eisenhower stayed at The Ship Hotel (as it had become) prior to the D-Day invasion of France.



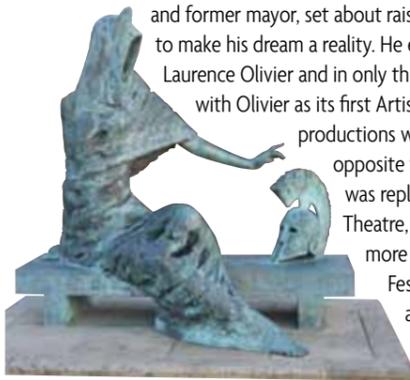
**10** Walk along Guildhall Street and enter through the gates into Priory Park. Ahead of you will be seen the former chapel of the Franciscan Order, commonly known as the 'Greyfriars.' After the dissolution of the monasteries it became the city's guildhall. In 1804 the poet and visionary, **William Blake** (1757–1827) was tried here for sedition, after he was accused of evicting drunken soldiers from his garden at Felpham with the words, 'Damn the King, damn the country and damn you too!' Thanks to his influential friends, the poet William Hayley and the publisher, Joseph Seagrave, Blake was represented by the best legal team available and was acquitted.



#### OPTIONAL ROUTE

Stop numbers 11 & 12 are an optional route. If you don't wish to follow this route proceed from stop 10 to stop 13.

**11** With Priory Park behind you walk along Guildhall Street to North Street and turn right, continuing to the underpass; on emerging keep the large car park to your right, and St Pauls Church to your left; continue on Broyle Road passing alms houses behind tall iron gates, to a large sign for the Festival Theatre; turn right down this lane and the Theatre is 100 metres ahead. **Leslie Evershed-Martin** (1903–1991) is commemorated in the fine statue of Minerva. Evershed-Martin conceived the idea of a Festival Theatre at Chichester, having seen how a similar project had been successfully completed in Canada. Back in 1933 he had formed the Chichester Players as a vehicle for dramatic art within the city. In 1959, Evershed-Martin, a city optician and former mayor, set about raising the £105,000 needed to make his dream a reality. He enlisted the support of Sir Laurence Olivier and in only three years he had his theatre,



with Olivier as its first Artistic Director. More daring productions were performed in a tent opposite the theatre. In 1989 the tent was replaced with today's Minerva Theatre, which still specialises in more challenging drama. The Festival Theatre continues to attract top actors and stage high-class productions to great acclaim.

**12** From the Festival Theatre return along the lane to Broyle Road; turn right and walk 50 metres to a footpath on the right; follow this across Oaklands Park to College Lane and the University of Chichester entrance is opposite to the right; head towards the library. The Bishop Otter Art Collection was conceived by **Sheila McCricker** (1916–2001) and **Elizabeth 'Betty' Murray** (1909–1998). McCricker was Head of Art at Bishop Otter College from 1949–1977, and Betty Murray was the college principal from 1948–1970. Between them the two women collected works from the great artists of the time, including Henry Moore, Christopher Wood, and Graham Sutherland. They persuaded artists to sell their works at affordable prices and often paid for works in instalments. The two women were motivated by the belief that works of art added to the quality of life of those who were students or worked in the college. The art work they collected can still be seen on display in the Otter Gallery at The University of Chichester campus. Retrace your steps back to Priory Park.



#### OPTIONAL ROUTE ENDS

**13** Exit Priory Park at the opposite corner from the entrance and onto Priory Road. Turn right onto East Walls and walk to the end where it meets East Street. Turn left into East Street. At Eastgate Square cross the road at the pelican crossing and bear left onto The Hornet. Cross The Hornet at the next pelican crossing and turn right. In a few yards you will reach the Almshouse Arcade. **Martha Dear** (1730–1807) was arguably Chichester's greatest philanthropist. She never married but inherited considerable estates from her father (a city alderman and town clerk) and uncle. Throughout her life, Martha gave generously to local charities. After her death in 1807, she left £1,000 to maintain the almshouses in The Hornet that had recently been rebuilt. Thenceforth they became known as 'Dear's Almshouses,' while the residents were affectionately referred to locally as the 'Old Dears.' New almshouses were built in St. Pancras in the 1970s and the old houses converted into shops. Martha Dear also left money in her will for the establishment of a Dispensary (early medical centre) in Broyle Road.



**14** With the Almshouse Arcade behind you cross over into Eastgate Square. Number 11 is situated at the apex of The Hornet and Market Road. Look up to see an oval plaque commemorating the stay here in 1819 of the youthful poet, **John Keats** (1795–1821), whose visits to the Vicar's Hall Crypt in South Street (see Trail Four) is believed to have inspired his celebrated poem, *The Eve of St Agnes*. It is believed that the poem was inspired by Keats' love for Fanny Brawne, whom he had met when she was seventeen. Keats died in Rome in 1821, with his love for Fanny unrequited.

**15** Proceed along East Street until you reach Little London on the right. Turn right and walk up Little London. On your right you will see number 30. **John Hack** (1805–1884), a Chichester Quaker, who was one of the most successful businessmen in the colony of South Australia, lived here as a young man. Hack and his wife left England in 1836. Once in Australia, Hack set himself up in business selling sheep, cattle, and milk. He had brought over two prefabricated 'portable cottages', which he set up at Glenelg and Adelaide respectively. He soon established bullock waggon teams running between the main settlements of the colony, delivering stores and supplies. He became a major landowner. He also established a Quaker meeting house in Adelaide. Hack lost much of his fortune in the crash of 1841, but gradually built up new businesses. He ended his days as the Controller of Accounts for the South Australian Railways.



**16** Retrace your steps until you reach East Street. On the opposite side of the road you will see number 58, which until 1988 was an inn called The Fleece (previously The Golden Fleece). The Puritan MP and regicide, **William Cawley** (1602–1667) is said to have been born here. In the 1820s, one of the city's Members of Parliament, **William Huskisson** (1770–1830), used the inn as an election headquarters. Huskisson held many high offices of State, including, President of the Board of Trade and Leader

of the House of Commons. He was killed by a train while attending the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830, the first person to die as a result of a railway accident.

**17** Continue along East Street until you reach number 21 on the right hand side. This site was the home of the early eighteenth century poet, **William Collins** (1721–1759), who was thought by some of his contemporaries to be an equal to the pastoral poet, Thomas Gray. Collins suffered extreme mental illness which hastened his early death. A later occupant was the publisher, Joseph Seagrave, who produced Chichester's first newspaper in 1796. After his death in 1808, his friend, the poet William Hayley, made an attempt to revive him using electricity, which futile attempt may have influenced Mary Shelley to write *Frankenstein* ten years later.

**18** Continue walking towards the market cross. Turn left into North Pallant. Numbers 7 and 8 North Pallant were bought in 1787 from the poet William Hayley by the musician and composer, **John Marsh** (1752–1828).

Marsh was one of England's most prolific composers, with at least 350 compositions to his name, including 39 symphonies. A great philanthropist in the city, he kept a journal for most of his life, documenting the musical and social mores of Georgian England.



**19** A few steps further down North Pallant you reach Pallant House on the left. Pallant House was built in 1712, by wealthy merchant, **Henry Peckham**. The house was built using the latest ideas in brick construction. Today Pallant House is a gallery of modern art. A modern extension has been built to house further

exhibits. The core of the collection was presented to Pallant House by **Walter Hussey** (1909–1985), who was Dean of Chichester Cathedral from 1955–1977. Hussey believed in bringing modern art into church life. He commissioned work by the great artists of the day, including Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, and John Piper, who created the large tapestry in the cathedral. Hussey also commissioned music from renowned composers, including, Benjamin Britten, William Walton, and Leonard Bernstein (whose Chichester Psalms received critical acclaim). With your back to Pallant House you are facing West Pallant. Walk along West Pallant and then turn right into South Street and return to the Market Cross.