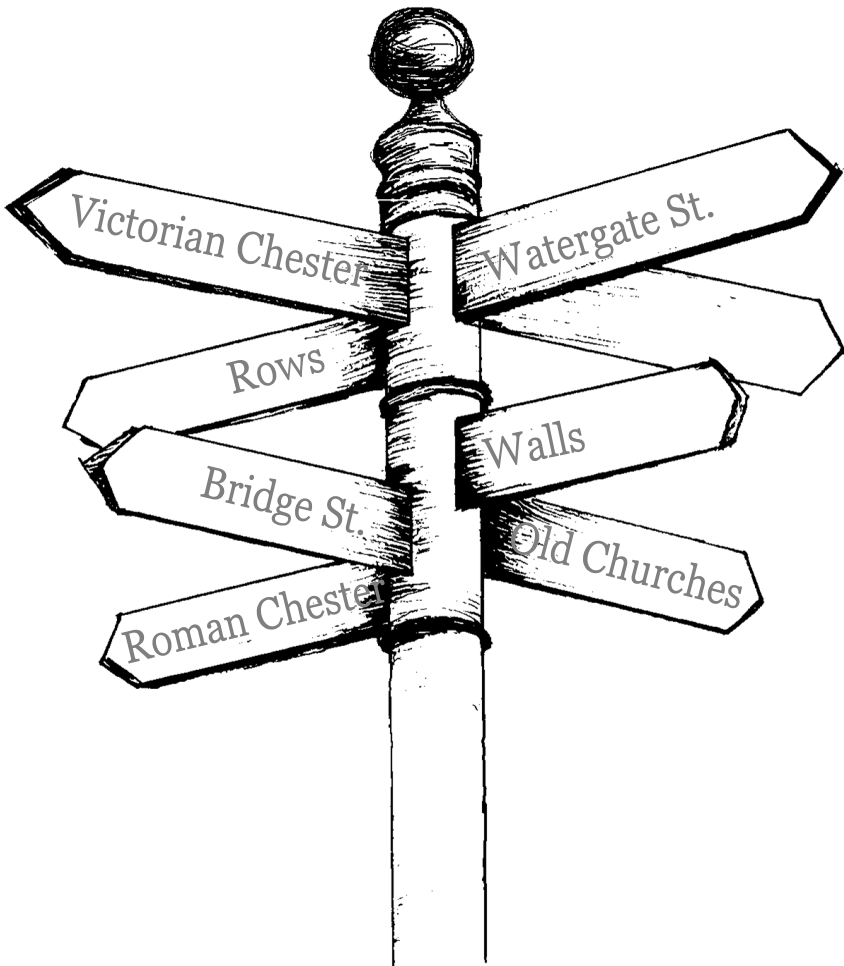


The Rows

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



The Rows have fascinated Chester's visitors and locals alike for over 700 years. Radiating from the Cross, in the heart of the walled city, the Rows line Chester's four main streets and are now one of its main attractions. This guide will help you discover a little bit more about what gives Chester one of England's most distinctive townscapes.

What are The Rows?

To put it simply, the Rows are covered galleries that line the first-floor level of much of Eastgate Street, Watergate Street and Bridge Street, together with part of Northgate Street. Fragments still also remain on Lower Bridge Street - if you know where to look...

Today they are home to a whole range of businesses. These include pubs, restaurants, cafes together with quirky independent shops. Some areas are bustling with visitors, while other parts can be surprisingly quiet and provide a pleasant spot to take a moment and watch the busy street below.

VIC Team

Why does Chester have the Rows?

The Rows are unique to Chester and their precise origins are unknown. Various theories have been put forward, but no one really knows.

One suggestion is that they were constructed on top of the rubble remaining from Roman times. Modern Chester was once the Roman fortress of Deva and much of the stonework remained a thousand years after it was built. Another idea is that medieval townsfolk wanted to improve the retail potential of their properties and being restricted by the Roman walls surrounding the city were forced to build store fronts vertically to maximise space and profit. A further theory is that they were built for security against Welsh raiders.

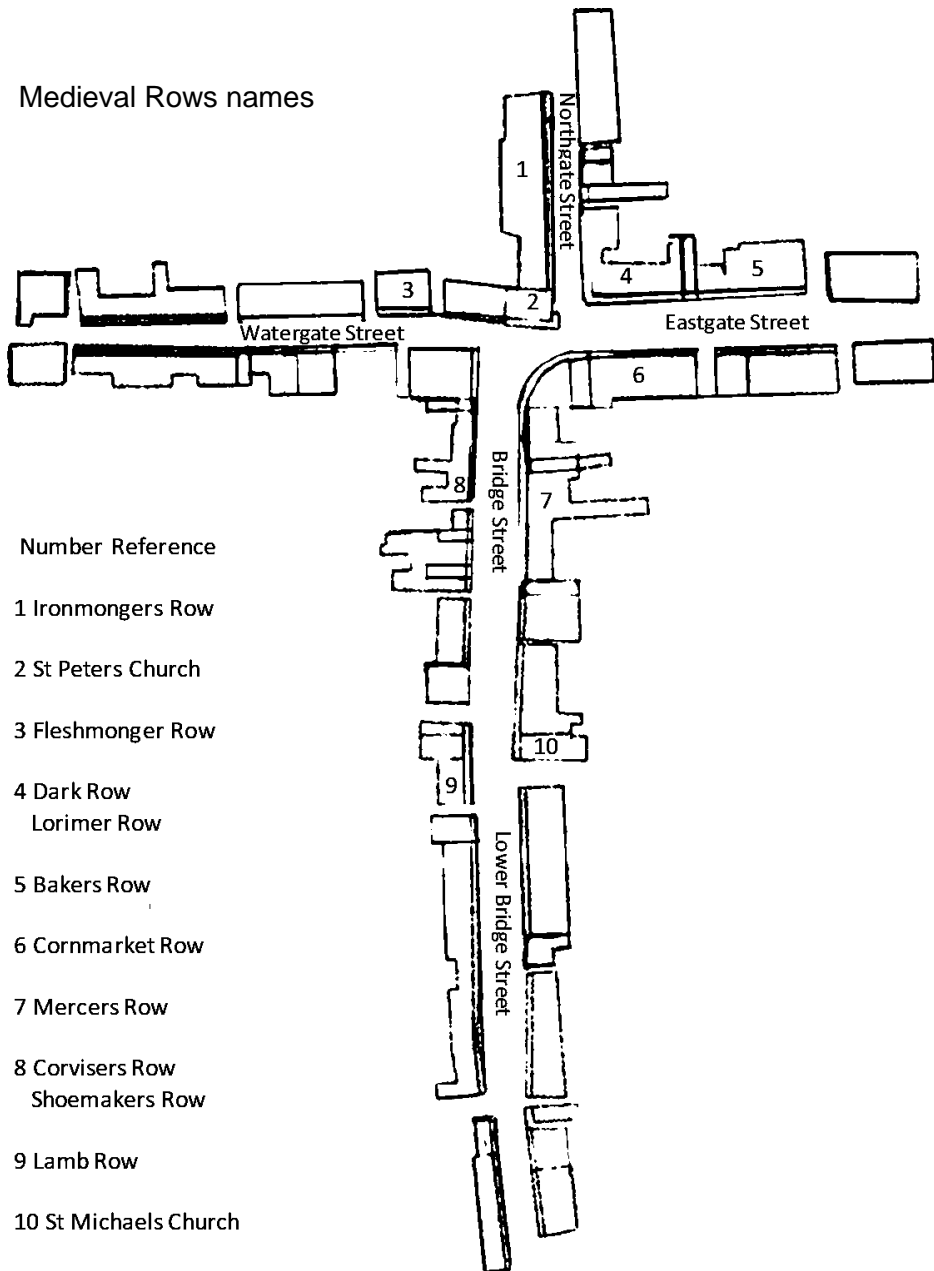
Whatever the reason, research suggests that the Rows probably began to develop in the late 13th century. The devastating fire suffered by the city in 1278, a period when Chester was an important medieval port, may have spurred their development as much of the city was rebuilt.

The Rows once bore the names of the various trades who clustered there. Bridge Street was the home of Shoemakers Row and Mercers Row, Watergate Street the site of the Butchers Row, Eastgate Street hosted Cornmarket Row while Ironmongers Row ran up Northgate Street.

Such was the fame of the Rows that notable visitors to the city commented on them. In the first half of the 18th century 'Robinson Crusoe' author Daniel Defoe complained that they made the city look 'both old and ugly' while Methodism's founder John Wesley commented on how they kept him clean and dry in any weather. A century later Victorian novelist and travel writer

George Borrow thought that the Rows contained 'All the best shops in Chester'.

Medieval Rows names



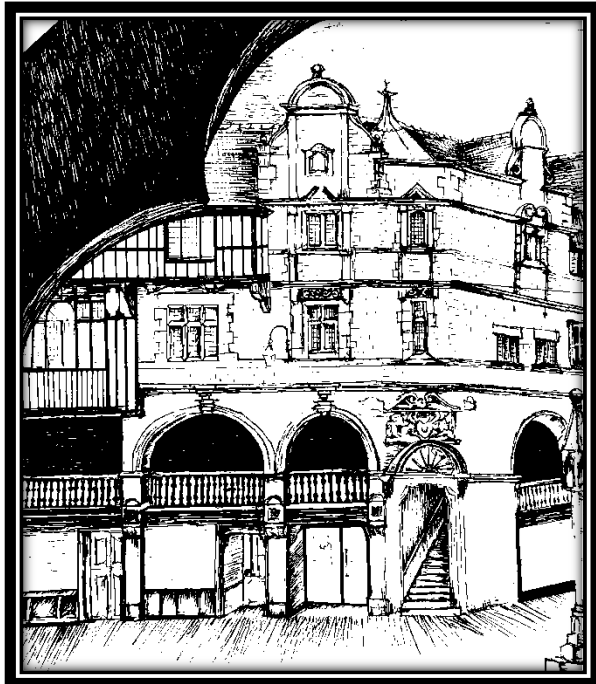
Number Reference

- 1 Ironmongers Row
- 2 St Peters Church
- 3 Fleshmonger Row
- 4 Dark Row
Lorimer Row
- 5 Bakers Row
- 6 Cornmarket Row
- 7 Mercers Row
- 8 Corvisers Row
Shoemakers Row
- 9 Lamb Row
- 10 St Michaels Church

The Rows once extended beyond their present limits. From the 17th to the early 19th century several property owners enclosed sections of the Rows when rebuilding or constructed entirely new properties that did not incorporate a Row. Lower Bridge Street in particular saw the almost complete loss of its Rows during this period.

The Walk

Our walk covers around 600 yds (1km). Take care – you may meet low beams and different floor surfaces as you walk. And don't forget to take a look at the Rows from street level as you explore. Many buildings house medieval undercrofts (sometimes called 'crypts'), often now the home of shops or cafes, that lie partly below street level. Tucked between the buildings are numerous flights of steps giving you the opportunity to pop up and down between the different levels.



VIC Team

From the Cross, the meeting point of Chester's four main Streets, take the steps at the corner of Watergate Street and Bridge Street and head down the Row on Watergate Street. This is Watergate Row South and takes you through God's Providence House, Leche House and Bishop Lloyd's House (or as it is sometimes called Palace), three of Chester's finest old timber framed buildings. The first bears a famous inscription 'Gods providence is mine inheritance' and is said to be thanks for keeping



its occupants safe from the plague that followed the English Civil War in 1647-8. Leche House is considered the best-preserved medieval town house in the city, while George Lloyd was a former Bishop of Chester in the early years of the 17th century.

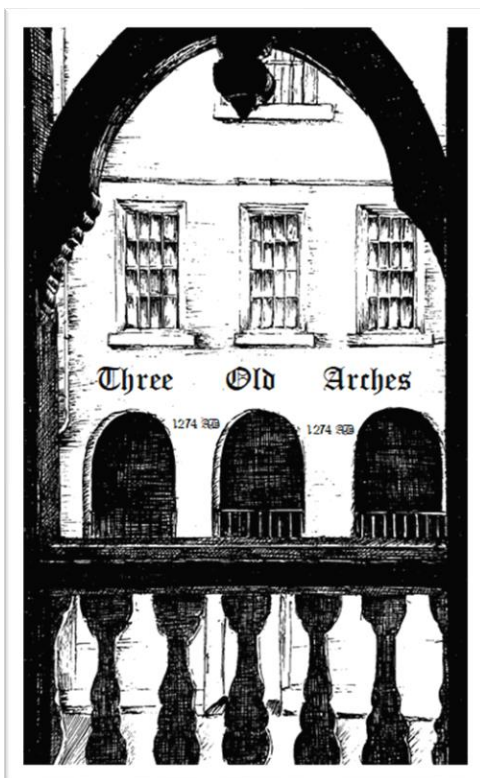
The Rows come to an end at Weaver Street, just before Ye Olde Custom House Inn. Take the steps down and walk over to the opposite side of Watergate

Street, heading back up towards the heart of the city. The Georgian brick buildings on your left once housed part of the Rows and you can still see the steps leading to doorways at what would once have been Row level. You will soon come to the narrow entrance to Crook Street on your left, which is where the Row on the north side of Watergate Street now begins.

Take the steps up to Row level and carry on heading back towards the Cross. You will shortly be walking through the frontage of Booth Mansion, the largest house on the street. It dates from 1700 and is angled slightly so it could be better seen from

the Cross, a bit of cheek that cost George Booth, the 2nd Earl of Warrington, a £10 fine. The mansion was built from two medieval town houses and many features from this earlier period remain behind the brick facade. This side of the Rows is often quiet and atmospheric. At the Victoria pub, the Row comes to an end, where it meets St Peters Church at the Cross.

Take the steps by St Peters and head back to the steps we first went up, but this time head down the western side of Bridge Street. Among the interesting old buildings on the street, the Row passes through the frontages of the Dutch Houses, once a 17th century town house. The Row crosses two narrow old lanes, Commonhall Street and Pierpoint Lane, by way of short pedestrian bridges before it passes through the Three Old Arches. Reckoned to be the oldest shop front in England, the date of 1274 painted on the facade shows that it has been a witness to many changes in the fortunes of the city.



Just beyond the Three Old Arches, the Row comes to an end. Take the steps down to street level but walk a short way further down Bridge Street to the junction with Grosvenor Street and Pepper Street. On the opposite side of Grosvenor Street, you will see the Falcon Inn. This half-timbered former Town House includes a section of Row enclosed in the 17th century, while opposite the Falcon, on the eastern side of Lower Bridge Street, lies this street's sole remaining stretch of Row. The junction of Bridge Street and Grosvenor Street also marks the site of one of Chester's most picturesque lost buildings. Old Lamb Row was a half-timbered building that over the years served as a home, shops, market, and an inn. It collapsed in 1821, but such was its reputation that luckily many artists recorded its charming appearance.



The former St Michael's Church sits in a prominent position at the bottom of Bridge Street and if you head up the steps by the church's entrance, you will find yourself back at Row Level. Continue heading along the Row, enjoying the shops, and passing the splendid Edwardian St Michaels Arcade, now an entrance to the Grosvenor Shopping Centre. You will soon be back at the Cross, where the Rows turn right onto Eastgate Street, Chester's busiest shopping Street and often a very busy section of the Rows. Standing on the Row and looking down towards the Cross is a great place to watch the Town Crier's proclamations in the summer months.



Price £1



@Chester01244

welcome@chestervic.co.uk

www.visitcheshire.com

Tel: 01244405340

VIC Team