

Chichester Heritage Trails



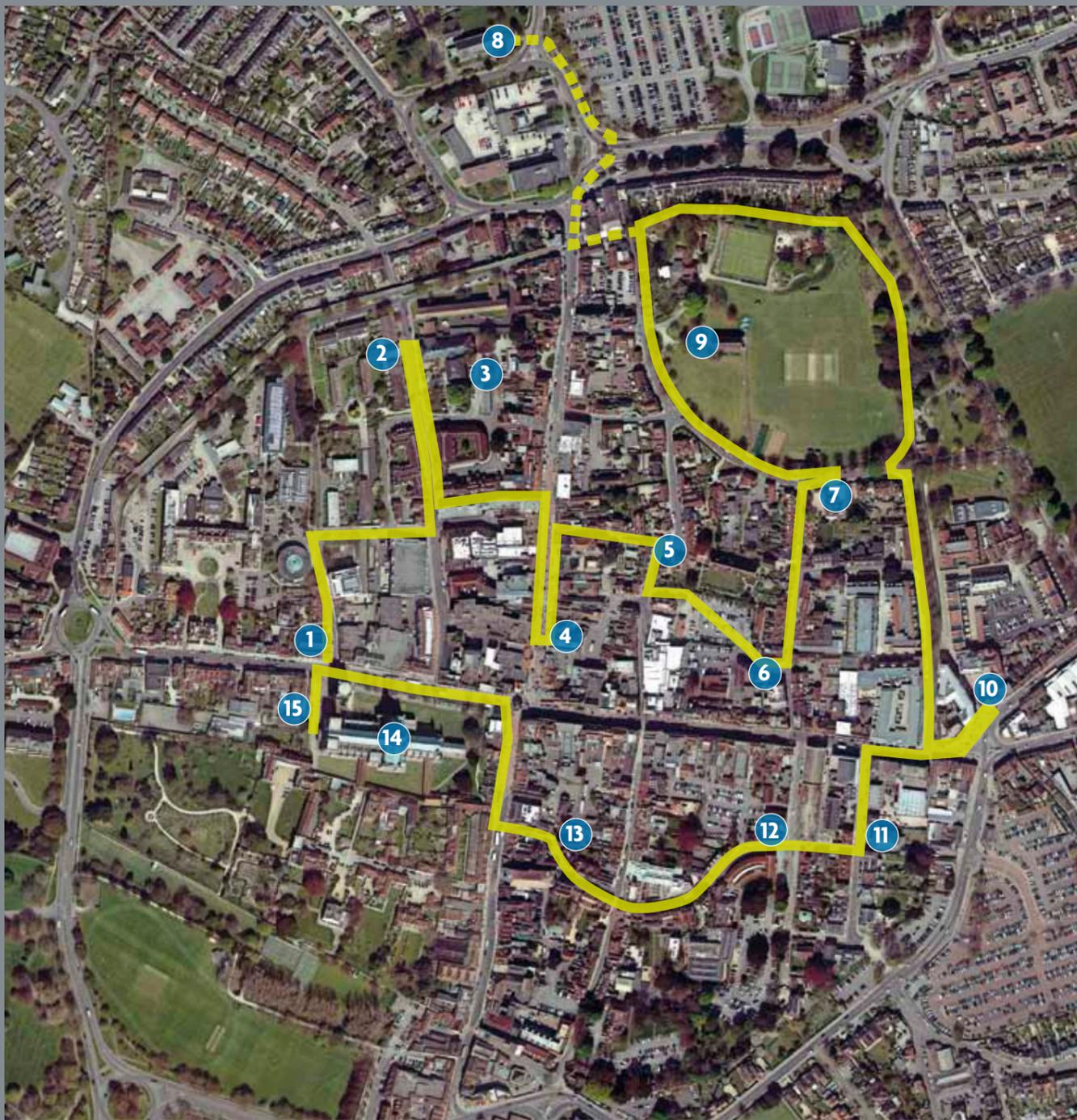
Trail 7: Churches and Chapels and places of worship

Introduction

Chichester once had nine parish churches, catering for a population, that in the seventeenth century, did not exceed 2,000 inhabitants. Today only two churches, St Paul's, and St Pancras, are still open for worship. As well as the Anglican churches, there were a number of non-conformist chapels that are also included in this trail. Churches and their clergy played a pivotal role in the life of the city. A person's social standing, as well as their piety, could be judged by the church they attended. Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists often lived separate social as well as religious lives. The city's Roman Catholics were the most marginalised of all religious denominations – a situation that persisted within living memory.



The interior of St Paul's, see number 8



The Shoe-maker poet

A humble Chichester shoe-maker, who left school at eleven, went on to become a poet of some renown, as well as becoming sexton and verger of Chichester Cathedral. **Charles Crocker** was born in Chichester in 1797 of poor parents. At the age of seven he was fortunate enough to win a place at the city's Grey Coat Charity School (not to be confused with the more famous Blue Coat school). Here he learned "those religious principles which have rendered my condition more than commonly blest". At the age of eleven, Crocker was apprenticed to a Chichester shoemaker and remained in that employment until he was forty-seven, latterly at a premises in Little London.

During these years, Crocker began to write poetry. He wrote of the landscape about him, including the trees and beauty spots he came to know and love so well. His two best received poems were 'The British Oak' and 'Kingley Vale'. He found his inspiration in the poetry of Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper, and the Chichester poet, William Collins. Crocker was hugely influenced by a lecture given in Chichester by the polymath and political reformer, John Thelwall, on the life and work of John Milton. This one lecture, Crocker later claimed, inspired him to write verse more than any book he ever read.

A Chichester doctor, John Forbes, befriended Crocker, and encouraged him to publish some of his poems. Crocker's collection, 'Kingley Vale and other Poems', appeared in 1830, to much acclaim. In one poem, 'Labour and the Muse', Crocker described how verse came to his mind as he worked –

*How sweetly pass the solitary hours,
When prison'd here with toil I sit and muse
My fancy roving 'mong poetic flowers,
Delighted with their beauteous forms and hues.*

Forbes went on to become Physician to the Queen's Household and was knighted by Queen Victoria. It was perhaps through Forbes' London connections that Crocker was introduced to Robert Southey, who declared that Crocker's 'To the British Oak', was "one of the finest, if not the finest [poem], in the English language". Crocker was now earning a good living as a poet and in 1844 he finally gave up shoe-making.

Crocker did not leave his beloved Chichester for the bright lights of London, but actually rooted himself more deeply in the city and its history. He became both sexton and verger of Chichester Cathedral. In 1848 he published 'Visit to Chichester Cathedral', the first ever guide book to the cathedral. As he grew older, Crocker delighted in taking visitors around the cathedral and telling them of its history and showing them the shrines and ornaments of that ancient place of worship. The collapse of the cathedral spire in 1861 greatly distressed Crocker, and it was said to have contributed to his untimely death later that year.

Crocker lived at 28 South Street and today there is a blue plaque on the building that commemorates his life in the city.

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.

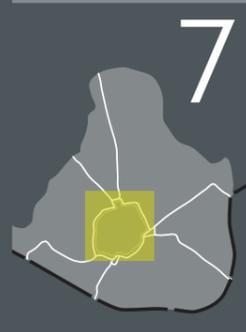
Chichester Heritage Trails

- 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.



Chichester City Council



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For further information

www.chichesterheritagetrails.org.uk
www.chichestersociety.org.uk

History People UK

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Written by Chris Hare

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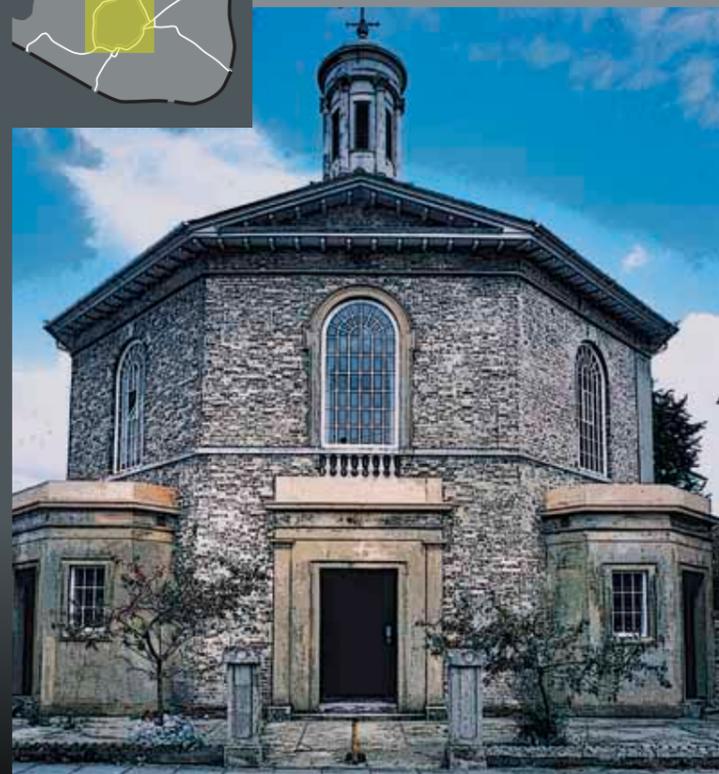


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Chichester Heritage Trails



Churches and Chapels and places of worship



A CHICHESTER SOCIETY PROJECT

1 Our first stop is the former church of **St Peter the Great**, which is situated on the corner of West Street and Tower Street. Although it appears to be old, even medieval, St Peter the Great was built in 1852 to the design of R. C. Carpenter. Previously the congregation of this parish worshipped in the north transept of the cathedral, but by the 1840s tensions between the two congregations made it desirable that the parish should have its own church. In 1953 it became the parish church for the city centre with the closure of the four remaining "Little Churches" (St Peter the Less, St Olav, St Andrew and All Saints). By the 1970s church attendances were falling, and St Peter's itself was no longer viable. It closed in 1979 and the following year St Paul's in Churchside became the parish church. The former church has been through several commercial uses since it closed. The memorial garden to the left of the building marks the spot where the church tower would have been built, but this plan never came to fruition.



2 Now head north up Tower Street, passing the Novium Museum on your right. Turn right into Woolstaplers, and then left into Chapel Street. Near the top of the street on your left you will see the **Calvinist Providence Chapel**, built in 1809 of Bognor rock. There is a memorial plaque to two Protestant martyrs burnt at the stake in Chichester in 1555, during the Counter-Reformation of Queen Mary Tudor's reign.



They were not Chichester men, but were executed here as a warning to their like-minded co-religionists. The memorial says they were 'Faithful unto Death,' but at the time, Bishop Day of Chichester described one of the martyrs, Richard Hooke of Alfriston, as being, "a child and nursing of Devilish iniquity," and "an obstinate and confirmed heretic."



3 Retrace your steps down Chapel Street, passing **St Cyriac's car park** on your left. A chapel once stood there, dedicated to this fourth century saint, whom Henry III (1216–1272) was said to have revered. He gave money for the upkeep of this chapel, which has long since been demolished. After passing Rose Court, turn left down Crane Street, then right into North Street.



4 **St Olav's Church** is the oldest religious building in the city. It is said to have been founded by Norwegian merchants in c. 1050 and dedicated to their martyred king, Olaf II, who died in battle in 1028. His successor, Cnut (Canute), was king of Denmark and England. The ancient little church, which was largely re-built in Victorian times, closed in 1953 when its benefice was united with St Peter the Great, and became a Christian bookshop in 1956. Now head north, back up North Street. Turn right into Lion Street and then enter St Martin's Square.



5 For the most part, this is a perfectly preserved corner of Georgian England, with an array of fine brickwork and elegant doorways and fanlights. The medieval church of **St Martin's**, located just to the south of the square, was largely rebuilt in 1803, owing to its parlous condition, at the expense of local benefactor, Martha Dear. However the construction proved to be unsound and the church was abandoned in 1904 and demolished in 1906. The congregation was then united with St Olav's. The outer walls now enclose a peaceful memorial garden that can be entered by the iron gate that faces the road. There was in the church a fine memorial by Westmacott to Martha Dear which was moved to St Olav's church where it can still be seen.



6 Leaving the garden, turn left and left again into the car park and head for Little London. To your right is another former church, **St Andrew's in the Oxmarket**, which has been converted into a community and arts centre. It was recently discovered to have a Norman nave. The etched windows represent the four muses. The church was badly damaged by a bomb in 1943, after which it was abandoned and the congregation moved to All Saints (see stop 13). Its benefice was united with St Peter the Great in 1953. There was once a churchyard, which closed in the nineteenth century. The modern car park now covers most of the site. The Arts Centre opened in 1976. Head north up Little London, then right into Priory Road.



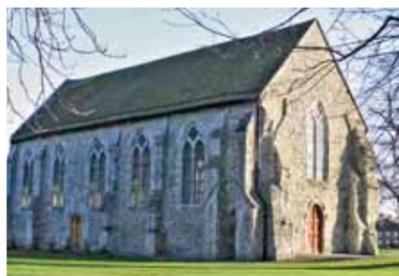
7 On your right you will see **The Friends' (Quaker) Meeting House** which was built in 1700 and which had hardly changed since then. Quakers established themselves in Chichester in the 1650s, although they suffered much persecution, including imprisonment, in their early days. The high wall around the Meeting House was built to protect worshippers from attacks by Anglicans and others, who viewed their practices of equality and pacifism with hostility. Head back along Priory Road with Priory Park on your right and continue to Priory Lane where you will see a small gate in the wall.

Here you can take a detour to visit **St Paul's**. Follow Priory Lane and turn right into Northgate. Take the underpass under Oaklands Way and St Paul's will be seen to your left at Churchside.



St Paul's was built in 1836 as a chapel of ease to St Peter the Great and became a parish church in its own right in 1845. At the time of its construction there were nine Anglican churches in the city. Since 1980 St Paul's has been the parish church for the city centre, replacing the four 'little churches' that closed in 1953, and St Peter the Great which closed in 1979. The church once had a three-stage tower, but this was demolished in 1950 as it was judged to be unsafe. Retrace your steps to Priory Park.

9 Enter Priory Park by the small gate and take the Walls Walk to your left. You will notice to your right the mound on which a medieval wooden castle once stood. Before you reach the Castle Mound, you will see on your right the former **chapel of the Franciscan Order** or 'Greyfriars'. The friars established a friary here in 1269. The Franciscans – in common with all other monastic orders – were abolished in England during the reign of Henry VIII (1509–1547). At the time of its closure, there were only seven brethren in residence. The sale of robes and vestments amounted to £10 17s, which was distributed among the former friars. At least three of the men were found work in Henry VIII's new church, being granted livings in the district. Later the former chapel was converted into the city's Guildhall. Sittings of the city magistrates took place here, as did, on occasion Quarter Sessions and Assize courts. Seven notorious smugglers – associates of the Hawkhurst Gang – were tried here in 1749 and the poet and visionary, William Blake was acquitted of sedition in 1804. The last courts were held here in the 1850s, but the election of coroners and the nomination of Members of Parliament continued to take place at the Guildhall until the 1880s. Chichester Cricket Club made their headquarters here at this time. The Guildhall was repaired in 1933 and a new roof added in 1967. The following year it was acquired by Chichester Museum.



10 Now continue along the walls, descend the ramp and leave Priory Park by the gate into Priory Road. Turn left then right into East Walls and continue to Eastgate Square. To your left is the parish church of **St Pancras**, which was rebuilt in 1750, the old church having been devastated during the siege of Chichester that took place in 1642 during the English Civil War. It is built of flints that have been cut (knapped) on all six faces to give square blocks which have been laid with very thin mortar courses – thinner than with brickwork.

11 With your back to St Pancras, turn right into East Street and then left into St John's Street. The **Chapel of St John the Evangelist** is a fine example of a yellow brick Georgian church in the classical style. It is a Grade I listed building, designed by the London architect James Elmes, and opened in 1813. It was an Anglican proprietary chapel, not a church (as it had no parish) and was built and run as a commercial business to solve the overcrowding problem in the city's tiny parish churches. The money to build

it came from the issue of shares, and the income from the sale and rent of private pews was used to cover the running costs, including the minister's stipend. The chapel was amalgamated with the benefice of St Pancras in 1954 and has not been used for regular services since 1973. It is now managed by the Churches Conservation Trust. Many musical and arts-based activities are held in the building. The Friary of the Blackfriars once dominated this part of Chichester, until it was closed, along with other monastic orders during the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s.

12 Turn right into New Town and on to Baffin's Lane. **Baffin's Hall** was built in 1721 as a Presbyterian Chapel later becoming the General Baptist Chapel and, finally, a Unitarian Chapel. The Rev. John Fullagar, minister here from 1818–1861, was very active in the life of the city and helped found the Mechanic's Institute, a school, and the Chichester Savings Bank. An obituary stated that he "united with talent of no ordinary calibre...a fearless love of truth and an instructive hatred of oppression." The chapel's balconies are an interesting feature and very much of their time. The building is now an auction house. Continue westward along East Pallant and then along West Pallant.



13 To your right, on the bend, is the former **church of All Saints** which was the only one of Chichester's churches mentioned in the Domesday Book. The current building dates back to the 13th century and closed as a church in 1953 when its benefice was amalgamated with St Peter the Great. There was originally a spire but that was taken down in 1805. The poet, William Hayley was baptised here in 1745. There used to be a churchyard but much of the area was turned into a car park in the 1960s, at which time the family tomb of John Marsh, a notable Chichester resident, was destroyed. Turn right into South Street and then left into West Street, until you reach the cathedral on your left.



14 Guides regularly take tours twice daily (except Sundays) around the **cathedral** and guide books 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 Church Norton near 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 in about 1400. The cathedral, which has undergone substantial restoration in recent years, was completed in the twelfth century, with additions in the fifteenth century, including the stone spire. During the summer of 1834 the city was hit by six substantial earth tremors. This weakened the spire, which had also been hit by lightning. In February 1861, following two years of 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.

15 The **statue to St Richard**, designed by Philip Jackson, was unveiled in 2000. St Richard was Bishop of Chichester from 1245 till 1253 and was venerated for his piety and learning. He preached extensively and several miracles were ascribed to him. He lived very humbly, wearing a hair shirt under his robes, and eating a diet of vegetables. After his death, his tomb in the cathedral became a place of pilgrimage and soon amassed precious offerings left by pilgrims. During the reign of Henry VIII, the tomb was judged to be idolatrous and destroyed as part of the king's religious reforms. Its valuable contents were conveyed to London at the behest of the King's Secretary, Thomas Cromwell.

