

# Through The Westgate



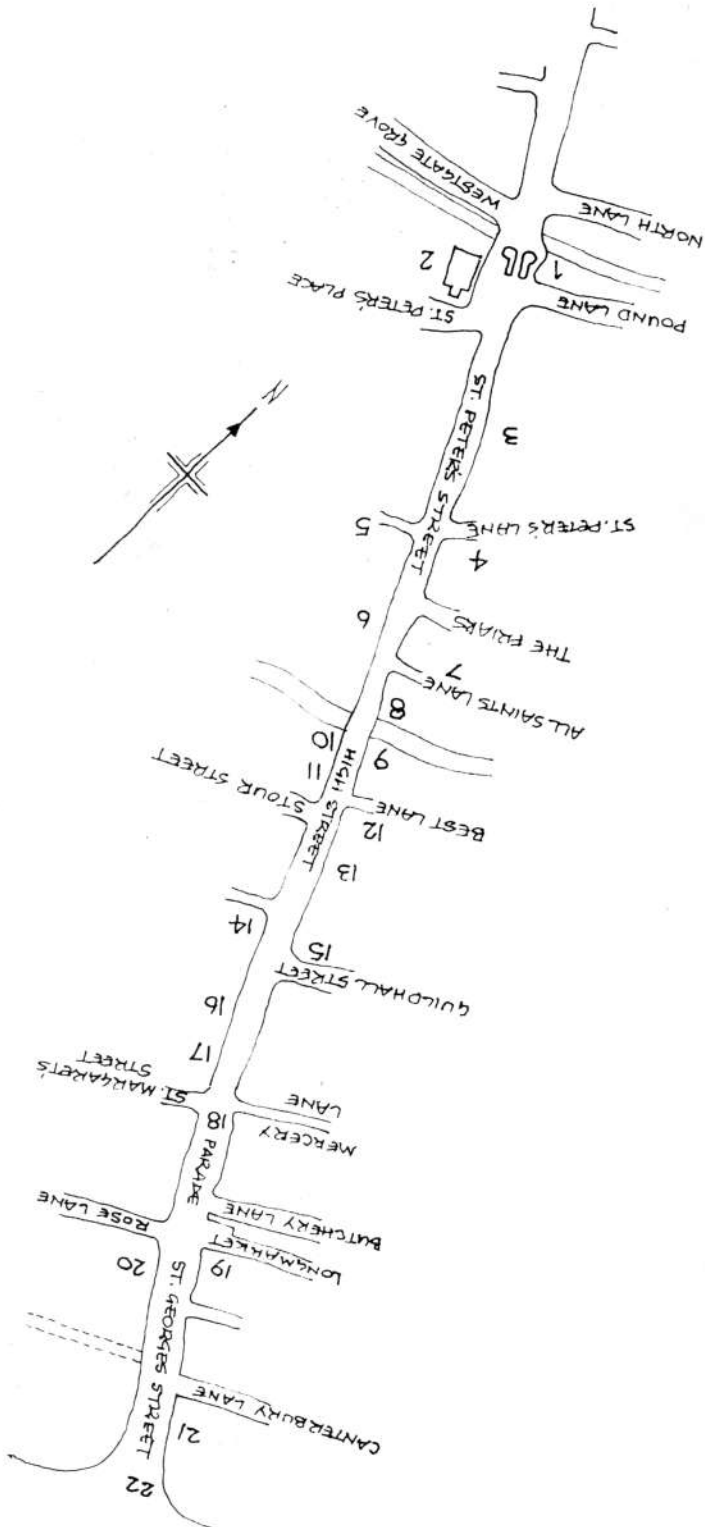
This tour of Canterbury's High Street begins at the Westgate Tower. It is hard to believe as you look through the gateway that this was once the main road for traffic from London to Dover in both directions.

The High Street changes its name as you walk along - St Peter's Street, Eastbridge, High Street, the Parade and St George's Street.

Canterbury City Trail No.12

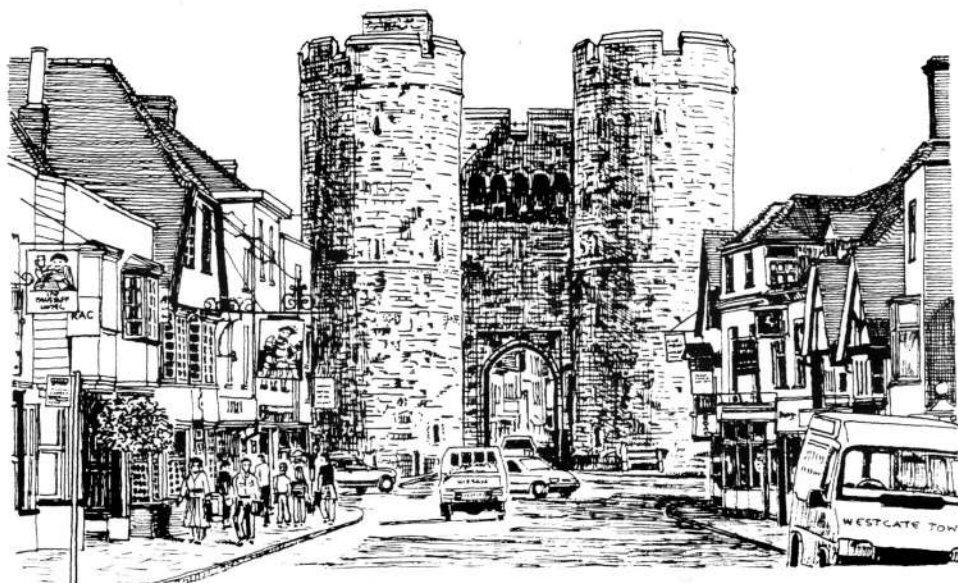


# Through the Westgate - Trail Map



# 1 - The Westgate

In the Middle Ages there were six city gates in use on the line of the City Walls. The Westgate was the most important as it controlled the road to and from London and would have been used by a great number of pilgrims visiting the city. The very first gate is thought to have been built in the third century. In the late Anglo-Saxon period the Holy Cross Church was built over the top of the gateway. In 1421 it was rebuilt next to the gateway and is now used as the city's Guildhall. The present gateway dates from 1381 and almost certainly stands on the site of a Roman entrance to the town.



Its original purpose was as part of the city's defences. Together with the city walls it provided security at night and in times of civil unrest. Pilgrims who were late reaching the city would find themselves locked out and therefore had to stay in one of the large inns, some of which are still to be found beyond this gate, in St Dunstan's. Those who were fortunate enough to have horses might well have spurred them on at a "Canterbury pace," which is how the term "canter" evolved. Between six and nine o'clock in the evening, animals were allowed into the city to forage and clear up garbage in the streets. Those that had not been collected by the allocated time were rounded up and put in a pound near the gate; the road running from the north side of the gate on the line of the city wall is still called Pound Lane.

The Westgate is probably the work of Henry Yevele who, together with a team of masons, was also responsible for extensive additions to the Cathedral. The gate's construction was paid for by Archbishop Simon of Sudbury who was murdered in 1381 during the Peasants' Revolt - his head was displayed on London Bridge for six days, and for many years after the Mayor and Corporation offered annual prayers at the Westgate and his tomb in the cathedral in a gesture of appreciation.

In 1648, during the Parliamentary Riots, the medieval gates were burned down on Christmas day, to be replaced in 1660.

## 2 - Holy Cross Church

The church that you see now was built in about 1380 when the new Westgate was built.

Originally situated over the Westgate, Archbishop Sudbury moved it to its present position. Ladies would often sit inside it to discreetly watch the hangings taking place at the Westgate Tower next door.



The building is now a redundant church and is used as the Council Chamber for meetings.



## 3 - St Peter's Street

### Sidney Cooper Building

Travelling along the main street towards the city centre, on the left you will see the Sidney Cooper Building, opposite Black Griffin Lane.

This building was formerly Canterbury College of Art and was founded by the artist T. Sidney Cooper (1803 - 1902), who was born in a cottage on the site.

It is now used by Chaucer Heritage.

### 4 - St Peter's Church

On the same side a little further along the road is St Peter's Church, a three-aisled hall church dating from the early Norman period, incorporating in the small tower a number of red tile fragments. The interior has kept its pre-19th century character - there is a fine Norman font and a late 17th century sounding board.



Just in front of St Peter's Church is number 13. This house was built around 1600 and the prominent gables and carved fascia boards are typical of the period. It also has a continuous jetty along the street frontage and some original eye level windows on the first floor.

## 5 - Methodist Church

Further along on the opposite side and set back from the road is the Methodist Church, with perfectly scaled portico. It is a classic revival building dating from 1811.



## 6 - Cogan House

Opposite The Friars is Cogan House. Currently used as a restaurant called Café Rouge, this is one of the finest examples of a stone and timber-framed house in Canterbury. The house is older than it appears and dates from c. 1160.

Timber framed gables dating from c.1590 are behind the 19th century parapet of the façade.

By 1520 it had been considerably modified; of interest inside are the Renaissance panelling and carved plaster ceilings.



## 7-All Saints' Lane



Before you reach the King's Bridge take a short detour into All Saints' Lane. This is a narrow cul-de-sac leading to All Saints' Court, a restored late 15th century half timbered building.

All Saints' Court dates from the fifteenth century and is a typical Kentish Merchant's House. The

main structure is a timber frame with the walls infilled between the timber structural members with wattle and daub, the wattle being a panel of woven split laths and the daub a kind of plaster reinforced with animal hair and finished with white limewash. The roof is steeply pitched and covered with small, hand made, clay tiles. Originally, the upper floor consisted of three chambers.

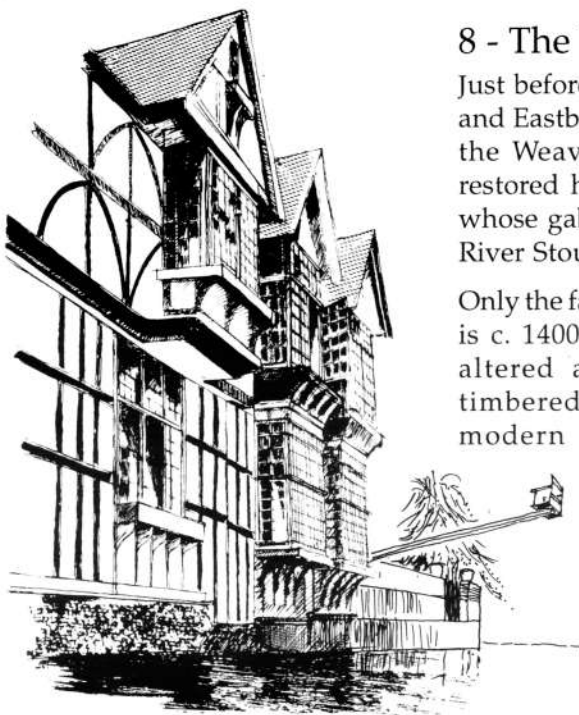
Most of the old houses of this period in Canterbury have the floors above the ground floor jettied, or overhanging. From a structural point of view this stabilises the wall beneath by creating a cantilever of the floor over. It also makes the most of a restricted city site, giving about 20% extra floor area to the upper storey(s) and, at the same time, creates a pleasant visual effect.

With regard to external decoration, the grotesques which adorn All Saints' Court are its outstanding feature. There are about eight of these and they show a variety of human and animal faces. Bizarre designs are a characteristic of medieval carving and it is thought that these represent the Old Celtic Gods that are associated with fertility rights, ancient fears and superstitions.

It is interesting to note, however, that the carvings on this house are not original but were brought from Lady Wootton's Priory in 1931. In fact, All Saints' Court might have been demolished had it not been for the enterprise of Mr Cozens, a local builder. The entire court had been condemned as unfit for human habitation in the 1930s, but he decided to restore it and it is to his foresight that we owe its preservation.







## 8 - The Weavers

Just before you reach the King's Bridge and Eastbridge, on the left you will find the Weavers c. 1180. This is a much restored half timbered Weavers' house whose gables overhang a branch of the River Stour.

Only the fabric of the houses on the street is c. 1400. These Tudor cottages were altered around 1570 and the half timbered effect on the outside is a modern addition. The rest of the building, comprising the two end gables over the river, date from the 1930s. The name "Weavers" comes from the Huguenot refugees who settled here to practise their crafts of dyeing and weaving along the river banks.

Today the building is used as a café and shop.

## 9 - The King's Bridge

On leaving All Saints' Lane the trail leads to the King's Bridge. This got its name because it carried the once named King's Street, now St Peter's Street or High Street, over the River Stour.

If you look to the left, downstream from the bridge, a Ducking Stool can be seen just beyond The Weavers building. It is a modern replica of one that was used in medieval times. Apparently, it was restored in 1660 and served as a punishment for "nightwalkers" and "Women of evil fame", as well as for scolds.

Thankfully, nowadays it is merely a tourist attraction!





## 10 - The Eastbridge Hospital

The Eastbridge Hospital is one of the oldest buildings in Canterbury, its name deriving from the fact that the structure spans the eastern branch of the River Stour. It was founded by Edward Fitzobold, a merchant, at the end of the twelfth century and endowed soon after this with land and the tithes from mills.

The Hospital was designed "to lodge the flood of poor sick pilgrims sleeping rough" and it succeeded in fulfilling this function throughout the middle ages, a hospital in the old sense of the word - a place giving hospitality - contrary to the popular story that it was an operating hospital where amputated limbs and spare parts were disposed of into the river!



The building's full name is the Eastbridge Hospital of Thomas the Martyr. Almost immediately after Thomas's death in 1170 pilgrims came to visit his tomb, hence the hospital's foundation as accommodation for these pilgrims. Feeling guilty about the murder of Thomas Becket, Henry II gave Thomas's sister the Eastbridge, then a toll bridge, so that she could collect the money. It was her son, Thomas Becket's nephew Ralph, who was the first Master. Since its foundation the Archbishop of Canterbury has been Patron. From the nineteenth century the Master has also been Rector of the City Centre Parish, now consisting of St Peter's and St Mildred's.

The building consists of a small entrance hall with a chapel on one side. Note the steps at the entrance - the road was raised in 1769 when the bridge was rebuilt. Before that people had to climb a couple of steps to get to the entrance door. From here further steps lead down into the stone built undercroft. Here, male pilgrims slept on beds of straw with beer and bread supplied by a woman who had to be aged over 40 to keep them from temptation. During a recent archaeological dig, fifteen layers of straw were found, so health and hygiene were clearly not priorities!

Upstairs there is a refectory and a larger chapel which was also used as the school room and access into the old people's flats.

After the Dissolution, the Hospital began to fall into disrepair but was saved by the intervention of Archbishops Parker and Whitgift, who gave it a wider charitable status. An act of 1584 required the Hospital to provide accommodation for five elderly women, who were to be selected according to need by the Mayor, and to pay a dole to ten more.

A little earlier in 1569 a school for twenty boys had been established. The school was closed in the late nineteenth century, but the Hospital still provides accommodation for the elderly, thus maintaining an almost unbroken tradition.



The list of Masters in the upstairs chapel shows this almost unbroken record. You can see that between the late 1340s and early 1380s three or four Masters followed each other in quick succession. These were the years when the plague and disease struck the city and the riverside areas were particularly vulnerable.

In the early years of this century a medieval wall painting was discovered on the north wall of the refectory. This, the construction of the undercroft and a tile on display on a wall are just some of the notable features of this building. The Hospital is open from Monday to Saturday 10.00 to 17.00 and Sunday 11.00 to 17.00

For enquiries phone (01227) 471688.

## 11 - The Post Office

Opposite Best Lane on the same side as the Eastbridge hospital you will find the Post Office.

Built in 1906 - 1907, it has Art Nouveau characteristics in the gable.



## 12 - Best Lane

Another detour brings you into Best Lane. The little garden on the left is the churchyard of All Saints' Church, twice rebuilt after Christopher Marlowe's time and finally demolished in the

1930s. Marlowe's mother Katherine was buried here in March 1605, sadly not in accordance with her wishes, which were to be buried with her husband John at St George's.

No 4-5 is a well restored example of a town house of Marlowe's time. It has two bays in the front and runs back three bays. It was occupied by a prosperous Walloon family.

The Walloons were generally French speaking strangers from the Netherlands.

### 13 - Beaney Institute

Further along the High Street on the left is the Royal Museum and Public Library, known as the Beaney Institute. This half-timbered Victorian building is medieval in style, but vastly out of scale and was opened in 1899.

It was built with money bequeathed by J.D. Beaney, a local citizen who emigrated to Australia and made his fortune as a doctor.

It is thought that the institute may stand on part of the Roman Forum, traces of which have been found under the yard at the back and under the County Hotel opposite.



The museum upstairs is open to the public and is free of charge.

## 14 - No 37 High Street

On the opposite side of the road, you will see number 37 High Street. Currently occupied by The Sock Shop, it has a fine vaulted crypt built c. 1160 - 1180 forming part of the shop.



century. One of the earliest Guilds in the country existed in Canterbury in the 9th century.

## 15 - The Guildhall

On the corner of Guildhall Street is Clarks' shoe shop. This is the site of the Guildhall, which was demolished in 1950 and there is a plaque which marks the spot.

The Guildhall had been the seat of the City Council since the 12th

## 16 - Queen Elizabeth's Guest Chamber

Queen Elizabeth's Guest Chamber on the right is basically an inn, dating from c. 1454. It was partially rebuilt in the 16th century and again in the 17th century, when the elaborate stucco decoration was added. The inn was known as "The Crown", which forms the main emblem in the stucco.

The present name refers to the monogram "E.R." in the fine plaster ceiling of the main first floor room. Tradition dictates that Elizabeth I entertained the Duke of Alençon here in 1573, the year the main salon was remodelled.



## 17 - Memorial Garden

Just in front of Nasons' store you will see a small garden area set back from the main street.

This marks the spot of the old St Mary Bredman church, known as the bakers' church - and near the site of the bread market. A Victorian replacement of the old church was demolished in 1900.

Now the Royal East Kent Yeomanry War memorial stands here.



The external work and entrance pavilion of Nasons, built in 1960, received a Civic Trust Award in 1963.



Look for the quotation on the trough.



## 18 - Mercery Lane

The view of Mercery Lane from the High Street is one of the most famous in Canterbury. This narrow street with its jettied houses on either side is as medieval in character as anywhere in the city and, with a glimpse of the Cathedral beyond, makes a fine approach to the main Cathedral gate fronting onto the Buttermarket.

Mercery Lane takes its name from Solomon the Mercer who sold cloth and silks here in the twelfth century from a corner shop where Boots now stands.

The next street along, between Mercery Lane and the Longmarket, is Butchery Lane which would have been the only place to buy meat in the City.



In the middle ages most of the left hand side of the Lane was occupied by an inn. This was the famous Chequers of the Hope which was built by Prior Chillenden in 1392 specially for pilgrims and which is mentioned by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. It was a massive timber framed building with a ninety foot (approx 30 metres) frontage onto the High Street and two wings, each of a hundred and ten feet (approx 34 metres), behind it. The first floor contained individual rooms, the doors to which were marked with symbols for the illiterate, and the upper storey was a large communal dormitory.

In medieval times vast numbers of pilgrims came to Canterbury from all over Europe and numbers reached a peak in 1220 when a hundred thousand are said to have celebrated the building of Becket's new shrine in the Cathedral's Trinity Chapel. Like modern visitors many of them would have wanted to take some souvenirs of their journey, and Mercery Lane would have contained shops and stalls selling lead medallions of Becket, badges, bottles of healing water from St Thomas's Well and other items. A selection of these pilgrim tokens can be seen in the Heritage Museum at the Poor Priests' Hospital. They come from shrines throughout Europe, thereby showing how widely the cult of St Thomas had spread.

A local carpenter was asked to carve a pair of corbel twins, which you can see in the eaves of the Boots shop. They were to commemorate the demise of the house owner's wife and children from the Black Death and the infestation of his house with rats. Two weeks after the hideous, half human, half animal carvings were installed, the rats left the house.

Although the level of Mercery Lane has risen two or three feet since Becket's time, you can still see some of the old Norman undercroft from the basement area in Boots, where steps lead down to an empty cellar. In the corner there is a shallow well which is lined with stone and illuminated by a carefully placed lamp. The entrance is rather restricted but you might obtain permission to see this part of the building by contacting the manager in advance.



Another worthwhile separate visit in this area can be made to the Roman Museum in Butchery Lane, open Monday to Saturday 10.00 - 17.00, plus Sunday 3.00 - 17.00 June to end October.

It is not open on Good Friday or at Christmas, and an admission charge is made.

## 19 - Longmarket

The Longmarket is a modern pedestrian precinct replacing an old covered market and corn exchange destroyed in May and June 1942 during World War II. This is the site of the old corn market established in 1824 by Act of Parliament. Beneath its foundations the basement is built around a Roman tessellated pavement.



The Roman remains were discovered in 1946 and are those of a house built round three sides of a courtyard. A visit to the Roman Museum located in Longmarket is an excellent detour here.

The Longmarket had two levels, selling corn, hops and seeds on the upper level and vegetables below. It became redundant in 1930.

Canterbury has never actually had a market charter and has not got a location large enough to have housed one market; however, over the years many small markets have existed.

The cattle and general market was situated just outside the city walls near where the bus station is now located.

The original corn market in St Andrew's Church was replaced in 1824 by the Longmarket site.

In 1766 King George III granted Canterbury the right by charter to act as the centre of the hop trade in East Kent.

A fish market was well established in the city by 1200 and was situated in St Margaret's Street, now occupied by a photographic print laboratory with the old façade restored.



The fishermen's church, St Mary Magdalene in Burgate, was founded on royal territory and subsequently sold to the citizens by Henry III in 1234.

The fish shambles were in Burgate near the church and remained there until 1620.

The Whitstable market was in the High Street near St Mary Bredman Church until the 15th century. This market was paved with Folkestone stone in 1480. However, the market place was unpopular with the women of Whitstable and in 1481 the tollenger was allowed ten shippings for "satisfaction for the loss he sustained from the women of Whitstable - for the space of one month and until their anger abates and they return to sell their fish in the market place".

The fish and Whitstable markets were amalgamated in 1620 as the fish market. A pump was installed in 1631 in Pykenot Alley to cleanse the area.

## 20 - Marks and Spencer

On this site in the 16th century Robert Cushman (it was he who transacted the hire of the famous ship of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Mayflower) worked in the grocer's shop of George Masters, next door to Christopher Marlowe's home.

In 1605 Cushman, a leading Puritan was tried by the Church Courts and excommunicated. He was imprisoned and later he moved to Holland where he joined forces with other non-conformist refugees from Canterbury. He returned to the city in 1617 to his own shop in The Parade - number 13, now an optician's.

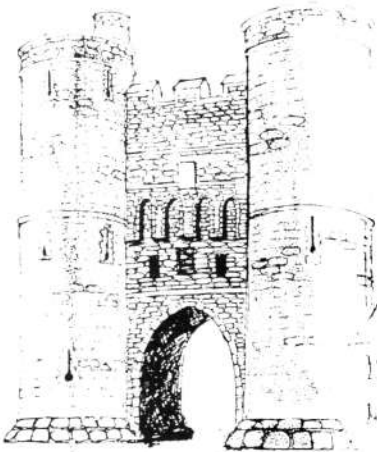


## St Georges Clock Tower

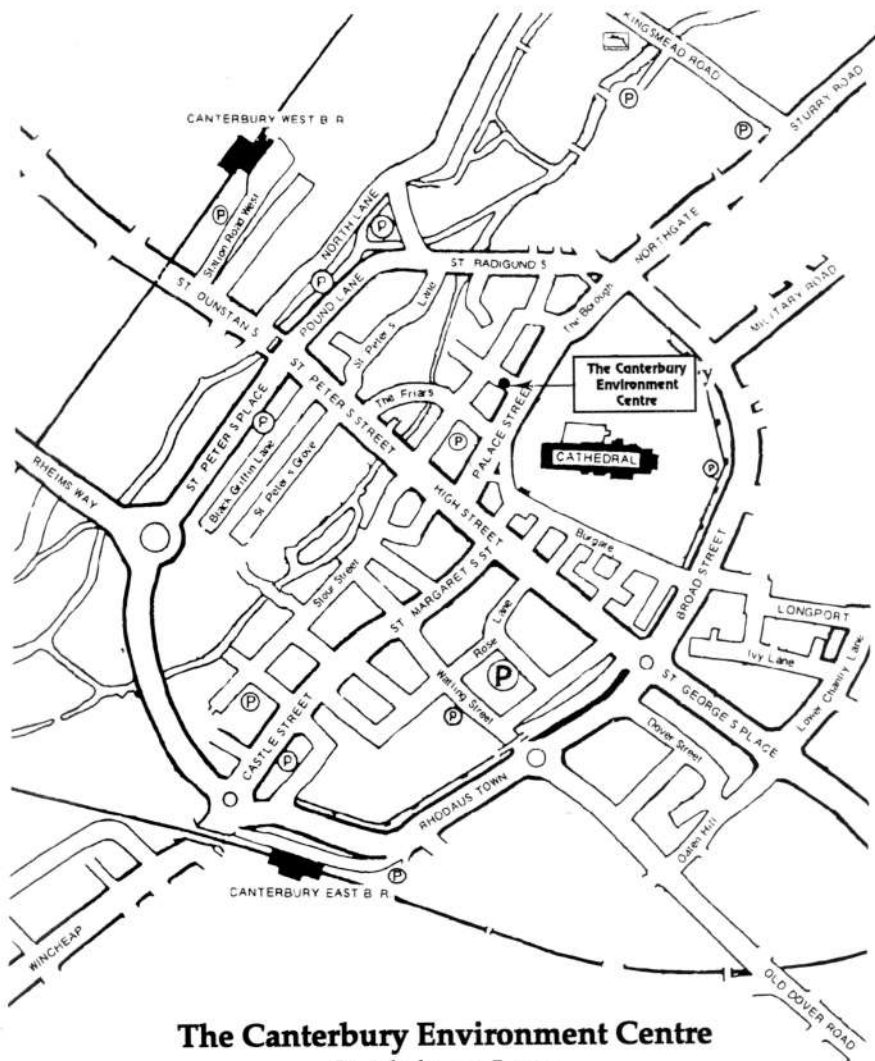


St Georges Tower is the only surviving part of St George the Martyr Church. This medieval church where Christopher Marlowe was baptised in 1564 was destroyed during a bombing raid on June 1st 1942.

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At the end of the street just before the roundabout is the site of the old St Georges Newingate erected in the mid tenth century. This "New" gate gave access to a new market area outside the city walls called the Rithercheap. This New-in-gate spanned a carriageway 7 ft wide. It was finally demolished in 1801.



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