

Walk Through the History of Lincoln's Lower High Street

MEDIEVAL MEANDERINGS

WALK
3



A circular walk of approximately 1.8 miles that can be completed in 60 - 75 minutes

A search for the lower High Street's medieval history.

Lincoln lower High Street was a district in its own right in the medieval period, filled with business, trade and incidents. Few buildings survive intact, but plenty of clues remain to tell this remarkable story.



MEDIEVAL MEANDERINGS

WALK 3

1. Tentercroft Street carpark is a convenient place to begin as it has parking and toilet facilities.
2. Take the pedestrian crossing over Tentercroft Street and head south along Kesteven Street. **Tentercroft street** gets its name from its use during the medieval period as a “tenting” ground or drying ground for the **wool cloth** made and dyed in Lincoln. The dyed and washed cloth was stretched out to dry in the open.
3. Walking south along Sincil Bank, the landscape is currently dominated by brick housing dating to the **Victorian** and **Edwardian** eras, with the insertion of 20th century concrete. This was largely installed in the last two hundred years and during the medieval, Tudor and Stuart eras the landscape would have been very different. In the past, the **Sincil Dyke** would have had sloping grass covered banks and the area to the east would have been pasture for animals, mainly cattle. On the west bank of Sincil Dyke, during the medieval period, was the Lower City wall which extended all the way down to the **South Common**. Where there are now streets running off the High Street, there would have been narrow enclosed plots belonging to the merchants houses that faced the High Street. These would have been a combination of kitchen garden and traders yard with outbuildings.
4. At the junction of Sincil Bank and Sausthorpe Street are a number of modern features with medieval origins. Here the **Great Gowt** drain joins the Sincil Dyke, and in earlier times there was a wide pool said to be the home of a water creature or spirit called a Nikor. A short distance to the south is a footbridge which stands on the site of a medieval plank bridge that was part of the Watergang, a footpath that went from the High Street to Canwick Road. Looking south along Sincil Dyke gives a clearer idea of how the watercourse used to look.
5. At the southern end of the Sincil Dyke, as it turns west, is a footbridge. This is where a fortified structure called **The Little Bargate** was located. This was one of the two gates that controlled access to the lower city. It was painted in the 1820s by **Peter De Wint**, and the remains were demolished sometime between 1826 and 1827.
6. By crossing South Park at the pedestrian crossing, it is possible to continue along the footpath into the **South Common**, a rare surviving medieval common that provides much needed green space to Lincoln.
7. Going north along High Street, facing the cathedral, you stand on a brick walled bridge over the Sincil Dike. In Medieval times this would have been the site of an imposing gatehouse with a towered gate, called the **Great Bargate**. It was here that one of the defining moments of the history of both Lincoln and England was tragically played out. In 1217 England was gripped by a civil war known as **The Barons’ War**. Lincoln Castle was held by **Nichola de la Haye** who was Loyal to King Henry and was besieged by an army of French and Rebel barons loyal to the rival King Louis. William Marshall, King Henry’s foremost general, brought an army to end the siege, surprising and quickly defeating the Anglo-French force. With the battle lost, the defeated soldiers, knights and noblemen, with all of their attendants and belongings attempted to flee down Lincoln High Street. Naturally the narrow stone gateway caused congestion and wagons became stuck. As the chaos continued, William Marshall’s men charged into them cutting them to pieces and looting their belongings. This battle would become known as **Lincoln Fair** as more time was spent looting than fighting. The Great Bargate was demolished around 1756.



8. Heading north, the medieval High Street would have looked very different from today. In medieval times it was a broad green, often covered in market booths, and lined with fine timber and stone houses. Generally, the area had a more rural feel, livestock were as common as people and the sense of business would have come from pedestrians and traders rather than the flow of vehicles.

9. On the east side of the street there is a **medieval church**, with a **Norman style tower**. This was one of several churches that lined the High Street in the medieval period and was originally dedicated to **St Botolph**. Today the church is owned by the **Greek Orthodox Church** and is dedicated to St Basil and St Paisios. Just north of the church is **Featherby Place**, where the low churchyard wall provides a convenient resting place. This was originally a medieval road leading southeast to the **Little Bargate**.

10. At **Gowt's Bridge** it is possible to look at the grass banked Gowt and possibly imagine the greener medieval streets and gardens of the area. In medieval times there were two stone footbridges either side of a ford, which would have been the only means for wagons to cross the Gowt.

11. On the east side of High Street is another medieval church, **St Peter at Gowts**, which contains some of the oldest stonework in the area, dating back to the **Anglo-Saxon era**, before the battle of Hastings. Where the Victorian vicarage stands today used to be a row of stone cottages, possibly of medieval origin.

12. A short distance north is **St Mary's Guildhall**, an impressive stone building with original medieval doorway and windows. This building would originally have been higher but was lowered as a safety precaution. The house was originally built in the 12th century as part of a complex that included stables, outhouses, servants' quarters and a brewhouse. A similar building that formerly stood on the other side of the road was misidentified as John of Gaunt's house, and thus the Guildhall was often called **John of Gaunt's stables**.



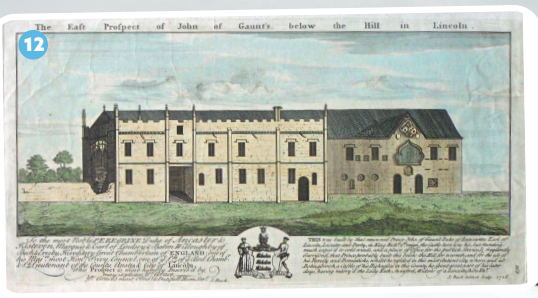
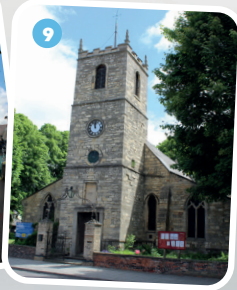
13. On the west side of the High Street is a row of cottages of mixed construction including rough stonework and timber framing. These give you an idea of what the cottages lining High Street would have looked like in times past.

14. At the northern end of the lower High Street, on the far side of the level crossing, is the church of **St Mary Le Wigford**. Wigford is the name that this part of lower Lincoln was known by in medieval times. The tower was built by a Viking merchant called Eirtig in the 11th century and is a rare survivor of that time.

15. Heading south again, the pedestrianised area is dominated by very modern shop frontages, but between two of the shops on the east, is a walkway called **Akrill's Passage**. This goes past the modern frontage and reveals, on the north side, the original timber framed wall of **Whitefriars House**, a wealthy merchant's house once typical of this end of the High Street.

16. **Akrill's Passage** leads into the northwest corner of Tentercroft Street carpark and the end of the walk.





St. Mary's Guildhall Lincoln © Historic England

5 *Lincoln from the South* by Peter de Wint (1784-1849)
Source: The Collection: Art & Archaeology in Lincolnshire (Usher Gallery)
11 Image by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733-1794)
12 *John of Gaunt's Palace, Lincoln* by Samuel Buck 1726

