

Walk One:

A Medieval Meander

A short circular walk exploring the highlights of Hexham's medieval heart.

Distance approximately ¾ km (½ mile).

Allow 30 to 40 minutes.

Use your sleuthing skills to discover a lost church, find some historic hostelries and work out where Hexham's defiant canons took up arms against Henry VIII's henchmen.

Start your walk in the Market Place, at the 'Heart of Hexham' panel in front of the Abbey. You can use the map to find your way.

Don't forget there are also written instructions and more information overleaf.

1 Market Place

Markets have been held here for centuries.

The panel shows what Hexham might have looked like 600 years ago, including a church that has completely disappeared. Use the picture on the panel to deduce which medieval building is still standing in the square.



2 St Mary's Chapel

Medieval St Mary's Chapel has long gone, but a bit of detective work will reveal where it once stood. Look for clues in the stonework in the wall beside the archway. Town houses were literally built into the church ruins!



3 The Grapes Inn

St Mary's Chare follows the curved wall that surrounded Hexham's 12th century priory. Stone buildings eventually replaced the wooden market stalls that were first built against the wall. There were inns too, such as The Grapes with its ornate gable.



4 The George & Dragon

Evidence reveals there were once six inns on this street. Spot the site of The George & Dragon on your right by its archway and gabled second floor windows. The frontage dates from about 1690, although parts of its inner courtyard are much older.

5 The Priory Wall

A group of canons came to Hexham in 1113 to spread the Christian faith. They rebuilt Hexham's great church and established a priory. This is a fragment of the original wall that surrounded it.

6 The Cloister

This was the heart of the former priory. The remnants of ornamental stonework give us a clue to what it looked like.



7 The Carnaby Building (The Prior's House)

King Henry VIII began closing down England's monasteries in 1536. Hexham's priory closed the following year and this building, the Prior's House, was granted to the town's bailiff, Sir Reynold Carnaby. Can you spot his coat of arms high up on the wall?

8 The Priory Gatehouse

This was the main gatehouse for the priory. When Henry VIII's men first came here to try and close the priory in 1536, the canons stood on the gatehouse roof, armed with bows and arrows, and refused to let them in!

9 Market Street

You can see again how the shops follow the curved boundary wall of the medieval priory. Hexham's Market Place grew up outside the wall and has been here ever since. Carry on your detective work in the Abbey to see if you can find more medieval evidence inside...



Walk One: A Medieval Meander (see the map on the previous page for more details).

From the Market Place 1 to St Mary's Chapel 2

Walk over the road towards the Shambles (covered market).

What is a Shambles?

A medieval word for a place where meat was butchered and sold.



To your right, behind the Shambles, is an alleyway. Go through it then stop at the railings. Look left to find remnants of the medieval St. Mary's Chapel that once stood here.



Local people used to walk through St Mary's Chapel to get from the Market Place to Battle Hill. They insisted on using this route even after the chapel fell into ruins and new shops and houses were built here – and it's still a right of way today!

Merchants set up stalls in the aisles of the ruined chapel to sell their wares. Look at the trail marker to find out what was for sale here.



From St Mary's Chapel 2 to The Grapes Inn 3 and The George & Dragon 4

Walk along St Mary's Chare, the curving, cobbled street in front of you.

As you walk along St Mary's Chare look out for this mysterious face carved in the stonework. It's part of a 300 year old doorway.



Look for The Grapes Inn on your right and, further along, a three storey gabled building that used to be the George & Dragon Inn. If it's open, go into The Courtyard behind the former inn to find some more shops.

When is a Chare not a Chare?

When it's a wynd! A chare is an old local word for a narrow lane between houses. It was commonly used in Newcastle, where there used to be 21 chares on the Quayside. A wynd is the same as a chare, but the term is used more widely in the north of England and also in Scotland.

From The George and Dragon 4 to The Priory wall 5

Where the cobbles stop, turn right into St Mary's Wynd. Follow the street around to the right. Pass the entrance to an alleyway on your right and then stop at the old stone wall, also on the right, with a trail marker on it.

The canons arrived in Hexham in 1113 and eventually numbered 26. They used simple tools like those shown on the trail marker to build their priory and restore the church here.

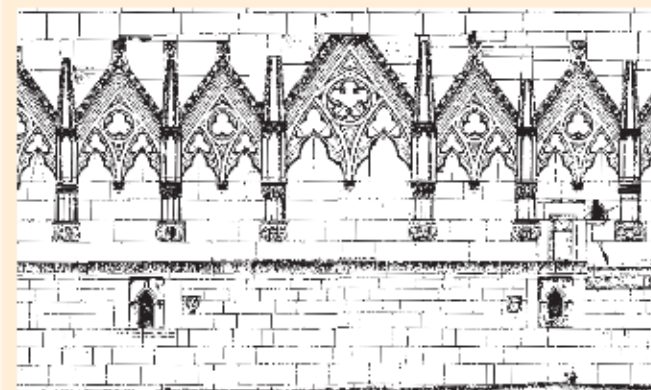
The canons lived by strict rules that governed their work and prayer. They did not live a secluded life, however. They shared their church and worked among the people of Hexhamshire.



From The Priory wall 5 to the Cloister 6

St Mary's Wynd continues to a T junction with Beaumont Street. Cross over with care in front of the Queen's Hall and turn right towards the Abbey. You will see a paved area on your left leading to the grassy cloister, where you will find another graphic panel. It shows how the cloister looked in about 1280.

The priory cloister was originally enclosed on all four sides. There was a refectory where you are now standing, where the canons ate their meals. Can you spot this decorative carving? This is all that is left of the 'lavatorium', where the canons washed before meals.



From the Cloister 6 to The Carnaby Building 7

Now walk through the archway beside the lavatorium. Walk straight ahead, then turn right through the large archway to reach a small car park.

Turn to your right to face the end of the Abbey and look up at the building now on your right. This used to be the Prior's House, and is now called the Carnaby Building.



From The Carnaby Building 7 to The Priory Gatehouse 8

Go out of the car park entrance. Walk straight on to the large stone archway on the road ahead of you. This is the Priory gatehouse.

The gatehouse looked very different when the canons lived here. It had a room above the archway with a flat roof. This was where the canons stood to defend the priory against closure by Henry VIII's men in 1536. Imagine how scared the King's two commissioners must have felt, facing 20 defiant canons and a crowd of angry townspeople!



From the Priory Gatehouse 8 to Market Street 9 and the Market Place 1

At the main road, turn right. This is Market Street. Keep following the curving Market Street round to the right. This will take you back to the Market Place.

Can you find the pavement plaque near the Moothall that commemorates the 1761 Hexham Riot? Local people re-enacted the bloody event here in 2004. Look at the panel in front of the Abbey to find out more.

