

# ST GEORGE'S GATE



St George's Gate in 1792. Paul Sandby, R.A. (1725–1809). © Canterbury Museums.

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St George's or Newingate was the only major gate in the city walls of Canterbury that was not of Roman build. It was probably first constructed in the late ninth or early tenth century after a gap had been made in the Roman city wall at the end of the new High Street. From this time until the gate's demolition about 900 years later it was, with the Westgate, one of the two most important gates in the City wall.

In the late Anglo-Saxon period a major new principal street was created across the centre of the city from an existing Roman gate on the north-west (Westgate) to a point on the south-east where a new gate was created – hence the name, which is a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon 'aet thaern neowan gate' (at the new gate). This new gate was almost certainly a simple stone archway, perhaps with an internal tower as at the surviving Watergate at Portchester Castle. It is first documented in a Canterbury Cathedral Charter of c1100. At this time the gate may have been strengthened or rebuilt, but no documentary evidence for this survives. From the mid-twelfth century onwards the Newingate is frequently mentioned in Christ Church rentals and it is clear that much of the land around the gate was being built on; a rental of 1163–7, for example, mentions 'land near Niwingate outside and against the City wall to the south'. Opposite the gate (ie under the first part of St George's Place) were a series of properties, including a large house belonging to Alan the Alderman, which were said to be near Newingate Cross. This cross, one of the earliest to be documented in the city, survived until the sixteenth century. In 1517 the Grand Jury of the Sessions declared that the cross was to be 'for the honour of God' and the inhabitants of Newingate ward ought to keep it in good repair.

As the gate was not a Roman or early Anglo-Saxon one, no major routes left the city from this point. People going to Dover would have turned right and then left up Dover Lane, now Dover Street, where the Cattle Market took place. They then turned right again going around Oaten Hill, where the Oat Market and later the gallows was situated, and finally left, after passing St Sepulchre's Nunnery, into the Dover Road, now the Old Dover Road. If on the other hand you wanted to go to Sandwich, you turned left outside the Newingate and then right up Ivy Lane. This lane, which was earlier called Loddere-lane (ie Beggar's Lane), started near the Salt Hill, which was perhaps a Roman burial mound, in origin situated just outside the city walls. In 1868, during the digging of the main sewer in Bridge Street, a very fine Roman lead coffin was discovered here, although, sadly, it was melted down soon afterwards.

During the Hundred Years War, Canterbury was at times in the front line with France and, later in the fourteenth century, the city defences on the west and north were refurbished and strengthened by the building of the Westgate and new external towers. At this time there must also have been plans to strengthen and rebuild the south-eastern defences, but it was not until the mid fifteenth century that there is documentary evidence for plans to rebuild the Newingate. In 1452 Roger Ridley, who had been four times mayor, left 5 marks for the rebuilding of the gate, but work does not seem to have started until at least 1469–70, when city accounts mention work at the 'East Gate', which was 'partly repair of the old gate and in other parts an entire new building'. Another ex mayor, William Bigg, also gave £10 in his will, in 1470, 'to the making and performing of St George's Gate, to be paid as the work goeth forward'. This was during the chaotic period in England when a power struggle between the young Edward IV and the Earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker') was taking place, which also involved the French king, Louis XI. In 1468 and 1469 Louis stirred up rebellions in England which were supported by Warwick; the city accounts for 1468 mention four pounds being paid to the Mayor to conduct soldiers to the assistance of the Earl of Warwick against the great fleet of France, being in the sea called the Downs, by Sandwich'. In 1470 the city contributed £251 to Edward IV and men were paid 'for watching at the Northgate. for the safety of the whole city, for 15 days at 4d. a day'. The other gates were similarly watched. There is also a remarkable mention of 'a payment of 7 shillings for the carriage of the great gun from Blackheath to Canterbury, and 5s. 7d. paid to four armed men for guarding the same, also 8d. for carriage of the brazen gun from the Court-hall (ie Guildhall) to the gates of the city and back again'.





*M. Thomas delin.*

*R. Pollard sculp.*

An eighteenth century engraving of St George's Gate. The building in the foreground carries the sign 'Knott Peruke Maker Hair Cutters'. Drawn by M Thomas, engraved by R Pollard.



It was perhaps not until 1463 that the Newingate, or St George's Gate as it was now more generally called, was finally rebuilt. In this year Mr Cook and Mr Petyt were appointed overseers of the new building of the gate and paid £10 in advance for 'part of their demand for repairing and new building the gate'. It is also mentioned that at this time expensive ashlar stone for the gate was brought by water from Maidstone to Whitstable and then over land to the city. Flints were also gathered for the work 'about Kingston, Upper Hardres and adjacent parishes, and were delivered at the gate for 1 shilling the cart load'. Chalk for the core-work must have come from the nearby quarry in the (Old) Dover Road. By 1495 the work was nearly complete and we are told that collections were made in every ward in the city and from strangers, amounting to £30 9s. 7d., for the work. In 1496 the city wall by the Newingate was repaired and earth was removed 'from the battlements within the wall'. Bricks for this work were delivered to the site at 5 shillings a thousand.

Only half a century later we hear of all 'the king's ditches without the walls' being let for pasturage, and part of the ditch near St George's Gate was described as the garden 'next where the butts [for archery] late were made'. Other accounts show minor repairs here at this time and a portcullis and a seat for a person keeping guard at the gate are also mentioned in the mid-sixteenth century. The upper part of the gate was at this time, like the Westgate, used as a prison (for freemen of the city) but it was also used as a common storehouse and magazine for military stores, and a military use continued until

the Civil War in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1648 the gates were burnt by Parliamentary troops, but they were replaced in 1660, only to be finally removed in 1785.

Eighteenth century engravings and descriptions of St George's Gate tell us that it was similar to, but smaller than, the Westgate, on which its design was clearly based. The gate had two projecting circular drum towers with battered ashlar plinths which projected into the ditch. Between the towers was the gateway itself, which had a portcullis and inside a two-leaved doorway. Outside there was clearly a drawbridge system and above the gateway were machicolations. Unlike the Westgate, however, the area below the machicolations and above the gateway contained three trefoil-headed niches (no doubt for religious statues which would have been destroyed at the Reformation) and three panels which perhaps contained coats-of-arms. The drum towers were faced in knapped flint and contained a series of gun ports (upside down keyholes) and access to the upper floors was by a spiral staircase behind the southern drum tower. The gateway passage was probably vaulted over and the side walls ended in stepped anglebuttresses; the latter being shown on the only known depiction of the inside of the gate.

By the mid eighteenth century part of the ditch to the south of St George's Gate had been filled in to make a new Cattle Market, and in 1754, after the demolition of Abbot's Conduit in The Parade, these two drum towers were utilised as





reservoirs for the city's water supply. Gostling tells us that 'there were pipes with public cocks [taps] to every one of the city's markets as well as to the town hall. In 1801 when the gate was demolished (see below) the reservoir was moved to the tower opposite Ivy Lane (which became, in turn, the Zion Chapel in 1845). In 1787 a new weighbridge for hay and straw was erected by the Mayor and Commonality (ie the City Council) outside St George's Gate.

The beginning of the end for the gate came in 1790 when the 'new road' was built from outside the gate. This road was named St George's Place and the New Dover Road soon afterwards. A decade later Bunce tells us that:

On the solicitation of upwards of 200 respectable neighbouring farmers and citizens, expressed in a petition, presented to the Court of Burghmote, complaining of the very great obstruction, that arose to carriages from the narrow passage of the gate; which was also, not only inconvenient but dangerous to foot passengers, the Corporation, to whom its materials were of great value, in levelling and paving their view Cattle Market, caused it to be taken down not without due consideration, or deep regret.

Accordingly on 22 April 1801 it was agreed to take down the gate. At the same time the city was sponsoring an Act of Parliament for 'enlarging, improving, and regulating the Cattle Market, within the city and county of Canterbury'. This was a hugely expensive undertaking which involved the levelling up of almost the whole ditch area between the site of St George's Gate and the Ridington and converting the area into a very large livestock market. The 1025 edition of Gostling's Walk about the City of Canterbury tells us that at the same time brick buildings were put up at the entrance to the market 'for the residence of a tollinger and other purposes relating to the market, which have since been removed. In 1822 the tolls were let by auction, under a lease for seven years, at the annual rent of £107'. We also learn from the city accounts that in 1802 the city wall by the Cattle Market was refaced in brick. Most interesting of all, however, are the City Records for 22 October 1802 which state:

The surveyor, on the part of the Court, Presents a bill for expenses incurred in improvements of the Cattle Market, the taking down of St George's Gate, removing the water cisterns and replacing same:

Amount	£3,820 0 0
Allowance for lead and other materials	£ 283 0 0
	£3,537 0 0
Part repaid by sale of estates	£1,300 0 0
Balance due	£2,237 0 0

Ordered sale of other estates to meet the same.

It was these debts which caused the city, among other things, to demolish and redevelop much of the northern city wall area.

By the later nineteenth century, as can be seen in early photographs, the Cattle Market was a very important focus for the city, overlooked from the west by the houses of St George's Terrace, which had been built on the Roman rampart, and surrounded on the south and west by large trees. The market was

held every Saturday for lean stock and on alternate Mondays for fat stock. On 1 June 1942 the whole area around the Cattle Market was destroyed by bombing and in 1955 the market was finally removed to a new site. A few years later a dual carriageway for the ring road was pushed through the area and a massive roundabout was built over the whole of the St George's Gate, Salt Hill and cross area. It is the reconstruction of this roundabout which allows a brief opportunity to examine what is left below ground.



The St George's area as depicted on a map of Canterbury, c1640.