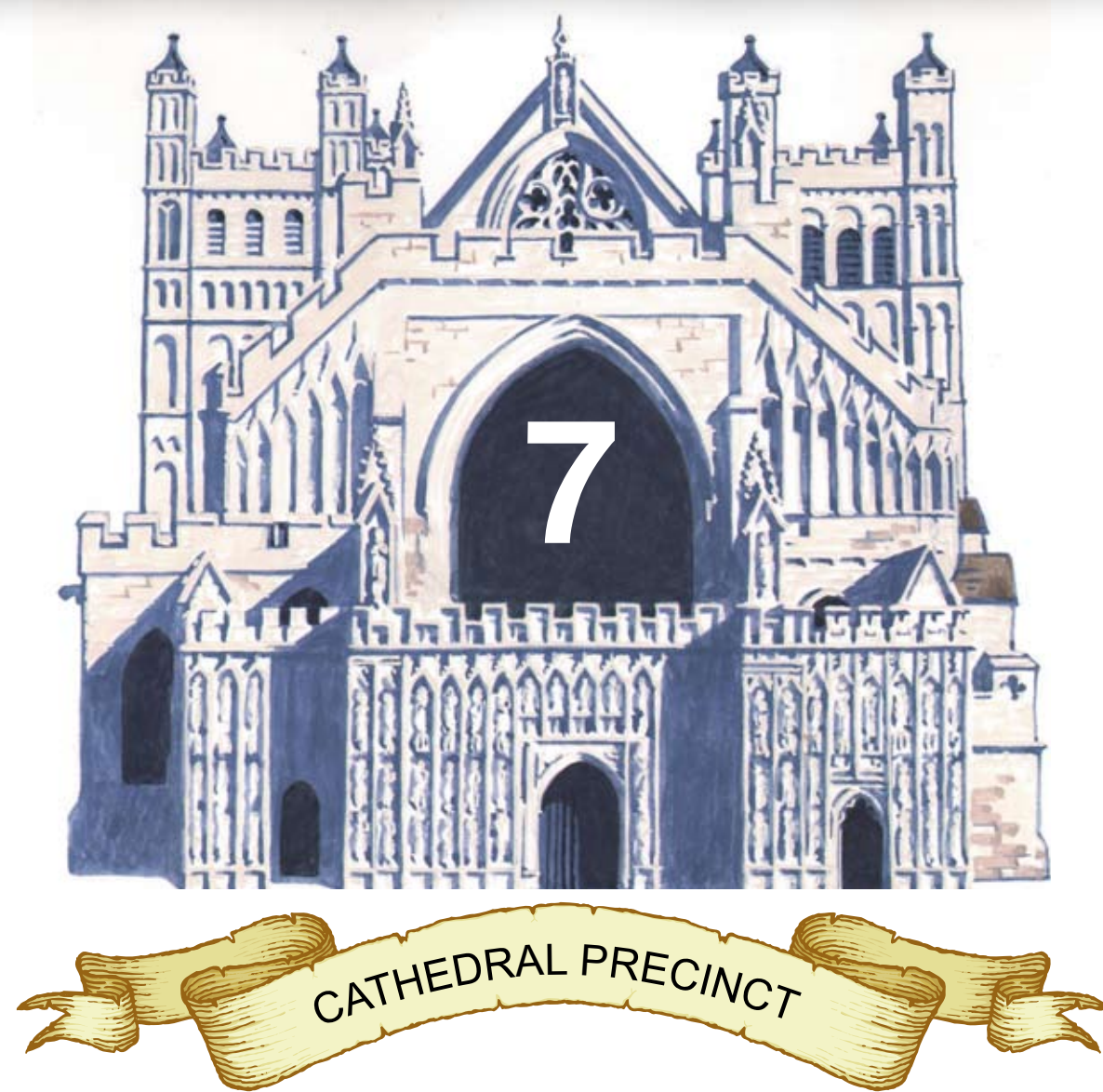


Exeter Medieval Trail



Exeter City Council



An Uneasy Partnership

Cathedral and City were often at odds. They fought over the Cathedral's water supply, and also because criminals often took refuge in the Cathedral enclosure where the City had no authority.

Murder most foul

In the early hours of the 5th November 1283 Cathedral Precentor Walter Lechlade was stabbed to death on his way to Matins. But who had done it? And who left the South Gate open so that the murderer(s) could escape?

The suspects

Suspicion pointed to John Pycot. Bishop Quinnel had fiercely challenged Pycot's somewhat dubious appointment as Dean, and vowed to replace him. Had Pycot therefore resorted to foul means to get rid of his closest rival, Lechlade?

And the open gate? Everybody knew Mayor Alured de la Porte was Pycot's friend. Case closed.

Or was it? Two years later there was still no verdict so in desperation the court invited King Edward I to preside over the case.

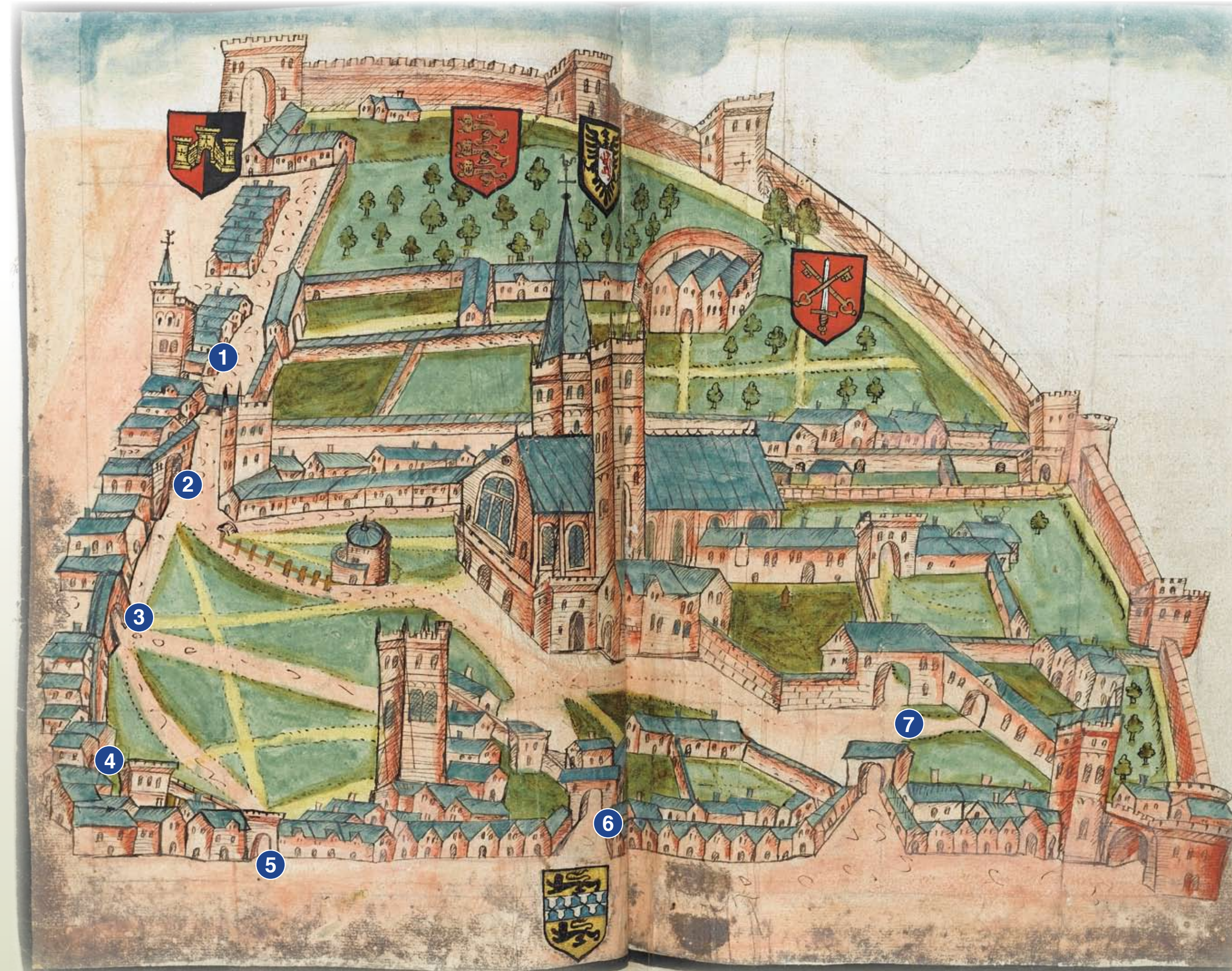


Reconstruction of Broadgate. This gate was the main gate into the Cathedral Precinct (© R.W. Parker Exeter Archaeology)

Protecting the Cathedral

A fearful Cathedral decided to prevent such a crime ever happening again. In 1286 a Royal licence permitted the Cathedral chapter to erect a 12 foot high wall around the Close with seven gates: 1 St. Catherine's. 2 St. Martin's. 3 Broadgate. 4 St. Petrock's. 5 Little Stile. 6 Bear Gate. 7 Palace Gate.

They varied in size from small pedestrian (postern) gates to gates for pack animals and carts. The gatekeeper lived at the three storey high main gate, Broadgate, and let people in and out after dusk when other gates were closed.

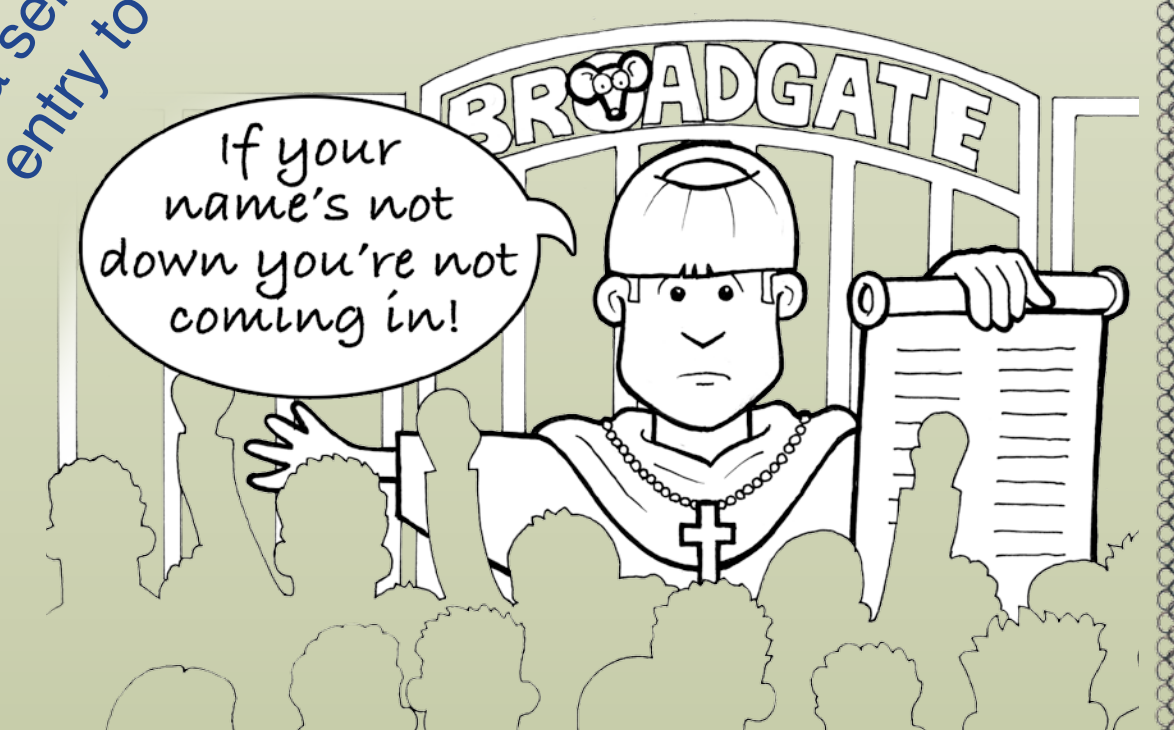


Hooker's view of the Eastern side City C. 1590. The Cathedral precinct and gates can be clearly seen. (© Source DRO ECA Book 52)



The gates were removed in the early 19th Century. They were replaced with stone posts with rings in them, allowing the Cathedral to bar access to the Close by raising the chain between the posts. This was a privilege that they enjoyed until 1928.

A wall and a series of gates restricted unwanted entry to the Cathedral precinct.



Royal justice?

The trial presided over by Edward I began on 24th December, 1285. By Boxing Day Mayor de la Porte had already been pronounced guilty of complicity. He was immediately hung in Northernhay.

By the trial's end four other people including the keeper of the South Gate were also sentenced to death.

But what of prime suspect, Dean Pycot? Pycot was pronounced guilty, but not executed. Instead he pleaded 'Privilege of Clergy', and was banished to a monastery.



Painting purported to be Edward I (© Dean and Chapter of Westminster)

