

Exeter Medieval Trail



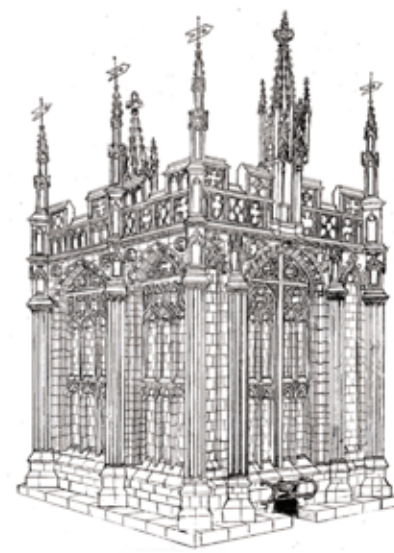
Exeter City Council



Water to the City

The Carfax (from the French 'Quatrefoix' – four ways) stood at the intersection of the city's two major thoroughfares. This was the site of the 'Great Conduit' built in 1441 – a public water fountain for Exeter's citizens, and a luxury in medieval times. Clean drinking water was precious – and scarce.

As the city grew, springs and wells could not meet public demand, and piped supplies of fresh water were brought into the city from springs outside the city wall. The first supply in the late 12th century belonged to the Cathedral, with the city building its own supply in the 15th century.



Reconstruction drawing of the Great Conduit
(© R.W. Parker Exeter Archaeology)

The problem with pipes

Water pipes were made of soft lead and often sprang leaks. They needed constant maintenance, but by the mid 14th century medieval workmen were tired of having to keep digging them up. Instead they constructed an ingenious system of underground vaulted passages to house them and make servicing easier. There were around ¼ mile of these passages beneath the city of which approximately 80% still remain. Why not explore them with a tour of Exeter's Underground Passages, located on Paris Street in the city centre.



A garderobe seat
(© RAMM)



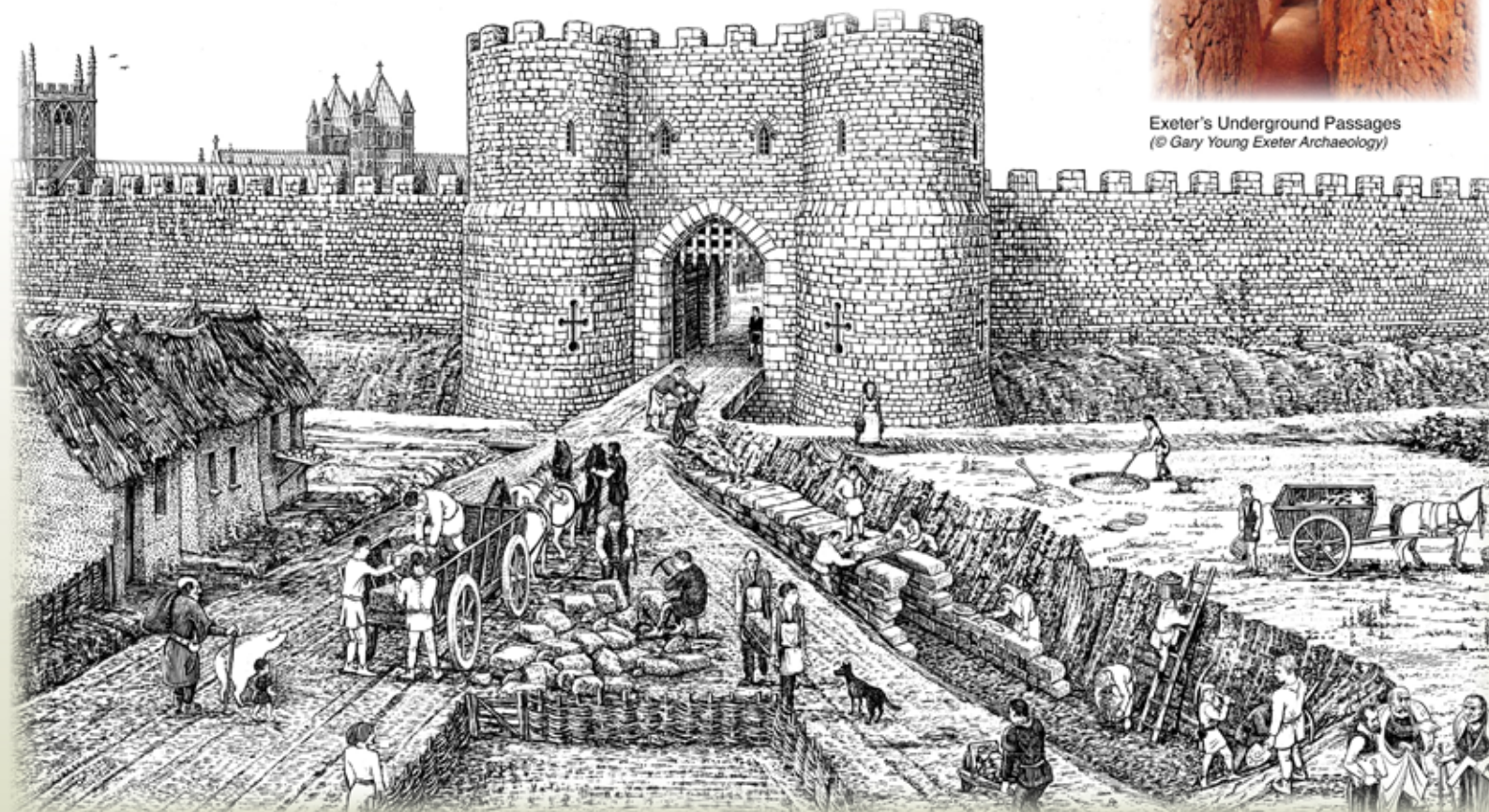
Exeter's Underground Passages
(© Gary Young Exeter Archaeology)

Sanitation and public health

In medieval times not many people lived beyond the age of 30. Poor diet was one cause for short life expectancy, another was poor hygiene. Although waste would normally be disposed of in cesspits, it was not uncommon for buckets of human waste to be thrown straight onto the streets and into watercourses, spreading disease. Some houses of the more wealthy did have sanitary provision, the 'garderobe', the medieval equivalent to an indoor toilet, where the waste fell into a cesspit.

Black Death

The terrible Black Death killed over a third of the English population between 1348 – 1350 and Exeter was no exception. Once infected, there were few survivors. You normally died within three days. The first symptoms were 'buboes', painful swellings in the groin, armpits and neck. Later, victims coughed up blood until finally the dreaded black spots completely covered their bodies.



Artists Impression of the Underground Passages being constructed
(© Piran Bishop Exeter Archaeology)

Exeter Medieval Trail

approx 1.75km (1.1 miles)



Board Locations			
1 CASTLE STREET	4 WYNARD'S ALMSHOUSES	7 CATHEDRAL PREBEND	P PARKING
2 CATHEDRAL YARD	5 SOUTHERN STREET	8 CATHEDRAL SQUARE	E EXETER VISITOR INFORMATION & TICKETS
3 SOUTHERNWAY	6 THE CARFAX		I QUAY HOUSE VISITOR CENTRE

Trail leaflets are available from the Exeter Visitor Information & Tickets and the Quay House Visitor Centre.

What caused the Black Death?



Medieval people thought the Black Death was a punishment from an angry God. To show repentance for their sins and earn God's mercy they would whip themselves (flagellation). Other medieval people thought it was an unusual

arrangement of planets in the sky causing an evil influence. Today we believe that the Black Death was spread by flea-infested rats, and the disease spread quickly due to the unhygienic nature of medieval cities.

