

Exeter Medieval Trail



Exeter City Council



A New Political Structure

The Norman Conquest changed the way Exeter was run. Rougemont Castle was built to maintain control, and gradually a new ruling merchant class evolved.

Henry I (1100 –1135) encouraged trade by selling charters to the merchants, and this gave them many political, legal, and commercial advantages. The powerful merchant guilds would eventually create a new civic authority although this did not become official until the 13th century.



A 12th century Royal Charter dating from the reign of Henry II
(Source: DRO, ECA Charter I)

Wealth and health

In the medieval period care for the sick, elderly, and infirm came from the church, or through endowments and bequests from wealthy people. Almshouses like Wynard's Almshouses built by the City Recorder William Wynard in 1435 provided housing for the

poor and infirm. Other medieval almshouses include The Ten Cells (or Grendon's almshouses) in Preston Street (founded 1406), Bonville's Almshouses in Coombe Street (founded 1408), and St. Catherine's Almshouses just off Princesshay founded in 1457.

The medieval NHS

In medieval hospitals the emphasis was not medical but spiritual. Patients made confession and heard mass, but received very little medical treatment. Exeter's first hospital, St. Mary Magdalen's leper hospital, was founded circa 1100 and lay outside the city walls in what is now Magdalen Street for fear of infection.



Wynard's Almshouses by Edward Ashworth
(© RAMM)



The Chapel and Hospital of St. John by W. Deeble after A. Glennie
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A second hospital, St. John's founded in 1238 was located just inside the East Gate while St. Alexius was established in the West Quarter in the 12th century. When St. Alexius failed the site was taken over for the Greyfriars monastery in the 13th century.



Ampulla mould – An ampulla was a pilgrim's badge in which holy water could be taken from a well or other holy place (© RAMM)

Don't try this at home!

Medieval treatments for illness were very different from those used today

Cure for measles, colds and fevers:
Eat a roasted mouse

Cure for toothache:

Wear a magpie's beak on a leather thong around your neck

Cure for kidney stones:

Apply a hot plaster smeared with honey and pigeon dung

