

society



Life in Devon saw many changes between the start of metalworking, 4,500 years ago, and the Roman invasion of 2,000 years ago. The population grew and trade increased. Strong leaders emerged. They may have been priests, warriors or landowners. The finest goods were placed in their graves.

About 3,000 years ago the climate became much wetter and windier. On Dartmoor peat bogs formed where there had once been farms.

The Romans in Devon



In the year 43 the Roman army invaded Britain. Why did this happen? The historian Tacitus explained that Britain had "gold, silver and other metals to make it worth conquering". The Roman army stayed for nearly 400 years. Objects found in excavations show how contact with the Roman Empire changed life in Devon.

With the Roman invasion Devon's prehistory ends and history begins with written documents and recorded dates.

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a workshop for mending tools and
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Wine from which is now France. Wine
from the Mediterranean in tall jars, called
amphorae and drinking glasses from the Middle East.

The fortress in Exeter,
around the year 70.

© RAMM / E. W. Haddon



Life in the legionary fortress

When the Second Augustan Legion reached the Exe, they built a fortress on high ground where the cathedral now stands. The fortress was called Isca, the British word for a river. It was linked by river, sea and military roads to a network of smaller forts in Devon and Cornwall.

The fortress was large enough to house 6,000 men. It had a rectangular plan surrounded by ditches and wooden palisades with a gateway on each side. Two wide roads crossed in the centre.

Isca was the first large settlement in Devon. Its remains lie under modern Exeter, so archaeologists have been able to excavate only small areas. They have uncovered traces

of ditches, streets and buildings including a barrack block, a bath-house and a workshop for mending tools and weapons. Archaeologists have found evidence that Isca was supplied with goods from all over the Roman Empire. Pottery came from Gaul, which is now France. Wine was shipped from the Mediterranean in tall jars, called amphorae, and served in glasses from the Middle East.

The fortress in Exeter,
around the year 70.

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Roman recreation

In 1971 the remains of a Roman bath-house were excavated in front of Exeter Cathedral. Soldiers went to the bath-house for outdoor exercise and gambling as well as bathing. It was a place to meet and talk.

The bath-house at Isca was a very impressive sight. It was one of the first buildings in Britain to use concrete, a building material that Roman engineers developed. The bath-house had glazed windows, mosaic floors and marble fittings. All these things were expensive luxuries.

Roman bath-houses had an effective system for heating the rooms and the water for bathing. The heat from two wood-fired furnaces was drawn up through hollow bricks and beneath the stone floors which were raised on short brick pillars.

A visit to the bath-house began outdoors with exercises, which were followed by bathing and relaxation in a warm room or *tepidarium*. Then came the steam room or *caldarium*. The bathing routine ended with a bracing plunge into cold water in the *frigidarium*.

Reconstruction drawing of the legionary bath-house.



After the legion left

In the mid-70s the Second Augustan Legion went north to fight the tribes in Wales. The local tribe, called the Dumnonii, were accustomed to Roman ways. Isca became their *civitas* or capital. It was known as Isca Dumnoniorum.

The town expanded beyond the old defences. A new forum, or market-place, was constructed. The bath-house was converted into the basilica, or main civic building. Trade with the Mediterranean continued bringing luxuries like wine and fine pottery. In the 3rd century new stone walls and gatehouses were built. Rich people lived in townhouses with costly mosaic floors. Other areas of housing fell into disuse or were converted into farmyards.

In 410 the last Roman soldiers left Britain to defend Rome against attacks by hostile tribes. By then Isca's suburbs were being abandoned. There are not many remains from this time. The dates of coins suggest that less and less money was flowing into the town. Fewer people lived there. By around 500 the basilica had fallen down and Isca's busy urban life was over.

The Roman town, around the year 350.

© Eireter Archaeology / E. Haldon



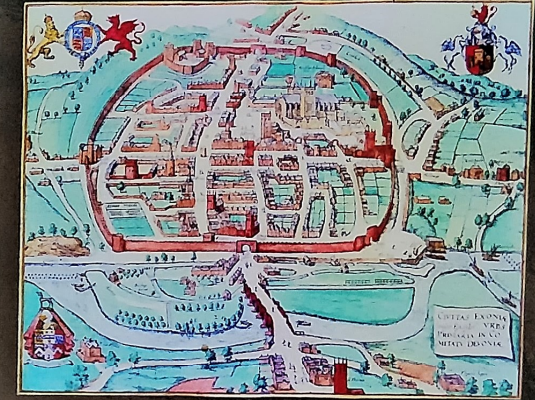
A stone wall has encircled Exeter since the Roman period

After the Roman army departed around the year 75, the merchants, craftsmen and families left behind craved the security of a defensive wall. The first building blocks were quarried from nearby Rougemont; courses of squared, grey blocks cut from volcanic stone, known as trap, can still be seen in many places. The Roman stone wall was built around the year 200 with a circuit of about 1.5 miles. It remains largely intact after almost two millennia.

Each generation has contributed to the wall's current form. The conquering Normans built a castle in its northern corner; in the Middle Ages North, South, East and West gates were added, only to be swept away by the Georgians to improve the flow of traffic into Exeter. The ground level inside the wall was lowered and the Roman foundations were faced with red Heavitree stone: so the later additions often appear lower than the Roman stone. Repairs were made by stonemasons through the ages to give the walls the characteristic and colourful patchwork we see today.

Not only has the wall seen changes over the centuries, the views it offers have changed markedly. For much of its history citizens strolling along its top would gaze down upon the hustle and bustle within the walls and the contrast with the open fields and farmland outside. From the 19th century major suburban growth began to erode this division and the 20th century saw more new roads cutting holes through the ancient circuit.

Today the wall serves to remind us of Exeter's tumultuous past – it has withstood invasions, rebellions, civil war and traffic schemes – and continues to provide a comforting presence around the modern city.



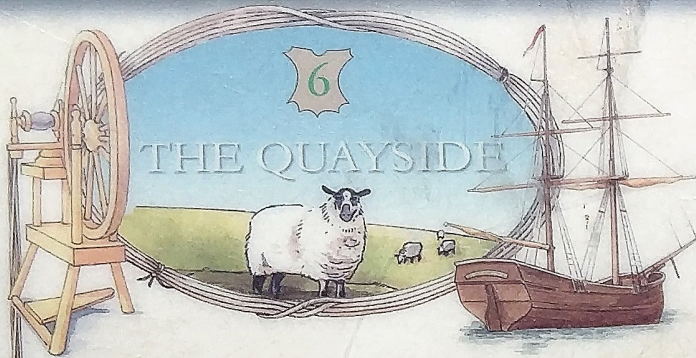
Civitas Exoniae- The City of Exeter. This is a 1618 print of a map originally published in 1587 and commissioned by John Hooker, Exeter's Chamberlain at the time. This copy was coloured in the 1980s.
© Exeter City Council



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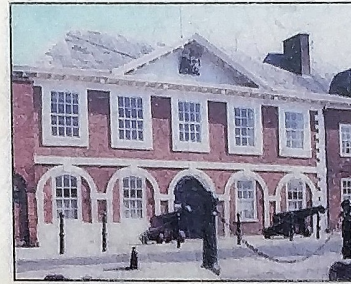






A new quay

This land between the city wall and the river has all been reclaimed from the River Exe in stages. The process began in 1564-6 when a new stone quay was built to take cargoes to and from the small tub boats that travelled along the newly dug canal. The quay behind you was extended further in the 1670s, 1680, 1760s and 1830s by which time sea-going ships could reach the city. A high wall once enclosed the quay to prevent smuggling.



The Custom House (Exeter City Museums)

'The fair house upon the key'

An increase in trade meant more tax could be collected and in 1680 the Custom House was built for the growing number of officials who carried out this task. This is the oldest custom house in Britain and one of the oldest surviving brick-buildings in the South West. It contains a grand staircase and some beautiful plasterwork ceilings, made by north Devon plasterer John Abbott for a cost of £35. The arcade at the front of the building was originally open so that goods could be inspected.



The Quay House.

Quay House

Built in 1680-1 at the height of the woollen cloth trade, cloth and other goods were stored here before being loaded onto 'lighters' (shallow bottomed barges), which took them down the canal to sea-going ships. The roof of the warehouse reached out over a dock next to it, enabling the lighters to unload their cargo in the dry.



Wharfinger's House.

The Wharfinger's House

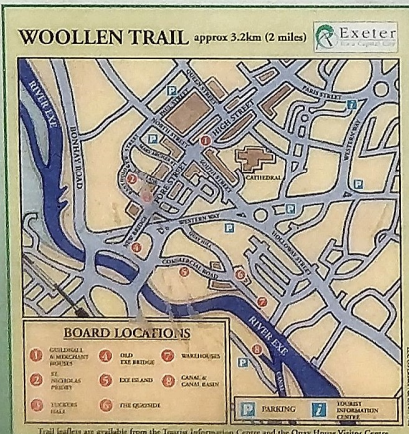
This gabled residence to your left was built in 1778 for the Wharfinger. He was the official in charge of collecting the wharfage fees.

The Fish Quay and King's Beam

The King's Beam, within the Fish Quay behind you, held the weighing scales used by customs officers to work out the duty to be charged on goods arriving at the Quay. It was made in 1838 at Bodley's Iron Foundry, just up from the Quay.



Reconstruction of Exeter Quay around 1680 by Jane Brayne (Exeter City Museums)



“There's cloth sailing to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Lisbon and Cadiz this week. It's so much better now that cargo can be loaded straight onto the sea-going vessels from here. Not so long back

it had to be taken down to Topsham in small boats because the larger ships couldn't get up this far. It was worth investing a bit of money into the new quay to save on haulage costs.”



If it takes 2 men 10 minutes to load 4 bales onto a ship, and if the ship sails to Rotterdam with 120 bales, how long will it take to load?



Answer: Five hours



