

Into the Middle Ages

400 to 1485

Select the caption you wish to read from the index below or scroll down to read them all in turn

Into the Middle Ages

1 - Harness pendant

2 - Harness pendant

3 - Harness pendant

4 - Harness pendant

5 - Harness pendant

6 - Harness pendant

7 - Ring brooch

8 - Gold brooch

9 - Gold ring

10 - Gold ring

11 - Gold ring

12 - Glass phial

13 - Ampulla

14 - Alabaster angel

Dinna Clerks: a deserted farmstead on Dartmoor

15-16 - Wooden bowls

- 17 - Penny of Henry III
- 18 - Bunghole pot
- 19 - Jug
- 20 - Jug
- 21 - Cooking pot
- 22 - Jugs from a well
- 23 - Misericord
- 24-26 - Bone combs
- 27-28 - Wooden combs
- 29 - Bone ring
- 30 - Gold ring
- 31 - Gold ring
- 32 - Gold ring
- 33 - Silver signet ring
- 34 - Silver signet ring
- 35 - Wooden scabbard lining
- 36 - Leather sheath
- 37 - Leather sheath
- 38 - Shoe
- 39 - Wooden bowl
- 40-41 - Wooden bowls
- 42 - Wooden bowl
- 43 - Mallet

- 44 - Aquamanile spout
- 45 - Aquamanile spout
- 46 - Roof finial
- 47 - Jug
- 48 - Bowl
- 49 - Jug
- 50 - Jug
- 51 - Jug
- 52 - Jug
- 53 - Jug
- 54 - Jug
- 55-56 - Saintonge jugs
- 57 - Jug
- 58 - Jug
- 59 - Coffin pall
- 60 - Seal of St Margaret's, Topsham
- 61-62 - Seal of Prior Thomas Dean
- 63 - The Exeter Puzzle Jug
- 64 - Ring
- 65 - Papal bulla
- 66 - Ampulla mould
- 67 - Holy water stoup
- 68 - Alabaster plaque

69 - Column base

70-75 - Fragments of screen

76 - Fragment of screen

77-78 - Inlaid floor-tiles

79 - Inlaid floor-tile

80 - Inlaid floor-tile

1 - Harness pendant

Around 1300-1400

From near Axminster

Colourful displays of heraldry were a feature of medieval dress and this extended to the decoration of horses. The decorations are often made of fairly cheap materials, and so may have been used to decorate servants' horses rather than those of knights or nobles.

Harness pendants were pinned to the leather harness but, judging from the large number found by metal-detectorists, they must have frequently fallen off.

2 - Harness pendant

Around 1325-1375

From near Sowton

The enamel decoration shows the heraldic arms of Bishop Grandisson, who was Bishop of Exeter between 1327 and 1369.

3 - Harness pendant

Around 1300-1400

From near Axminster

This badly damaged mount still has traces of enamel decoration in the form of an owl on a shield.

4 - Harness pendant

Around 1300-1400

From near Pinhoe

The enamel decoration shows three buckles or brooches.

5 - Harness pendant

Around 1300-1400

From near Chudleigh

In the form of a heraldic shield.

6 - Harness pendant

Around 1325-1350

From near Chudleigh

The enamel decoration commemorates the marriage in 1325 of Hugh Courtenay, second Earl of Devon to Margaret de Bohun. It shows the combined heraldic arms of the Courtney and Bohun families.

7 - Ring brooch

Around 1300-1400

From near Kingsteignton

This miniature gold brooch was probably given as a love token. It is inscribed with 'A AMIE AD NUN ALIS'. The meaning of this is unclear but it starts 'to a friend...'

8 - Gold brooch

Around 1300-1400

From near Wilmington

In the form of a six-pointed star over a circle. The small holes probably held semi-precious stones. Most gems had symbolic meanings in the medieval world, so the choice and positioning of the gems probably held meaning for the wearer of this brooch.

9 - Gold ring

Around 1500-1550

Found near Bicton

A good example of a posy ring, given as a love token, it is engraved with flowers and the words 'en bon foy', meaning 'in good faith'.

It was found by James Autton and is known as the Autton Treasure.

10 - Gold ring

Around 1300

From near Woodbury

This elegant ring is set with an emerald. It was found by Nigel Tucker whilst metal-detecting.

11 -Gold ring

Around 1400-1500

From near Sherford

This ring is engraved with three tau crosses. The tau cross is a T-shaped cross, the symbol of St Anthony and the Resurrection. These associations led to the belief that it helped protect from the plague and a disease called St Anthony's fire. This ring is also engraved with 'nul si bien', meaning 'none so good'. It was probably believed to ward off illness.

On loan from the finder, Garry Wyatt

12 - Glass phial

Around 1350-1530

From Crediton

Possibly used to hold oil or holy water.

13 - Ampulla

Around 1350-1530

From near Teigngrace

An ampulla is a container of holy water brought back as a souvenir from a pilgrimage to one of England's many shrines and holy wells. Ampullae must have been widely circulated, as they are now quite common finds for metal-detectorists.

14 - Alabaster angel

Around 1400

From near Pinhoe

An angel playing the lute, probably from a larger panel relating to the Life of the Virgin Mary. This piece and others were discovered in the early 19th century. They seem to have been rescued from the destruction of the Reformation and buried in a box. This is the only piece whose whereabouts is known today.

Dinna Clerks: a deserted farmstead on Dartmoor

When the burning roof of this house came crashing down it brought an end to habitation on the site. However, this sudden calamity effectively froze the house in time. When E.M. Minter, a local archaeologist, excavated the site, she found the house contents had been left exactly where they had been used that fateful day.

15-16 - Wooden bowls

Around 1250-1350

Found at Dinna Clerks

Both found near to the hearth in the main living area of the house. Nearby was a cooking pot sunk into the floor. This must have been the kitchen and eating area.

17 - Penny of Henry III

Minted 1253-1260

Found at Dinna Clerks

Found in the corner of the house where animals were kept. It was probably lost accidentally. Dinna Clerks must have been abandoned sometime after the date of this coin.

18 - Bunghole pot

Around 1250-1350

Found at Dinna Clerks

Found with jugs and pots in a small separate area at the top end of the house. This might have been a cooler room used as a larder.

19 - Jug

Around 1250-1350

Found at Dinna Clerks

This came from the larder, and was used to hold water, milk, beer or cider.

20 - Jug

Around 1250-1350

Found at Dinna Clerks

This is the most elegant pot from Dinna Clerks. Its shape is similar to that of fashionable French pottery found in Exeter. Although most surrounding farmsteads got their pots from Totnes, all of the pots at Dinna Clerks were made in North Devon.

21 - Cooking pot

Around 1250-1350

Found at Dinna Clerks

The farmstead had to grow most of its own food. The small fields were used to grow oats, rye and a few vegetables. Some cows, sheep and, almost certainly, a pig were kept. This cooking pot would have been used to make a lot of gruel and porridge.

22 - Jugs from a well

Around 1400-1450

From Princesshay, Exeter

This remarkable collection of jugs from a medieval well shows the variety of colours, forms and decoration used by local potters. The jugs must have been brought to the well to fill with water, where they were either accidentally dropped down the well or broken, and the pieces thrown away.

They were found during the redevelopment of Princesshay by Land Securities, a project that gave archaeologists a chance to investigate a large area of the city centre. The work was carried out by Exeter Archaeology in 2005 and 2006. Layer after layer of Exeter's history was uncovered: including Roman tile production, medieval rubbish pits, the Blackfriars church with 70 burials and Civil War defences.

The jugs were first brought to light one Saturday in March 2006. Derek Dugdale, a digger driver working on the Princesshay development, made an amazing discovery. His digger uncovered a well full of medieval pottery. Luckily he stopped work and reported his find to an archaeologist working for Exeter Archaeology. When the well was excavated it was found to contain over 3,000 sherds of pottery from around 100 pots.

23 - Misericord

Around 1400-1500

From the Harry Hems Collection

Medieval church services had long periods of standing in prayer. A misericord is a small, shelf-like seat that the priest or monk could rest on whilst standing. They were usually skilfully carved, often with a humorous element. This one depicts a lady picking nits from her companion's hair.

24-26 - Bone combs

Around 1400-1600

Found in Exeter

Personal grooming would have been an important part of everyday medieval life. These combs would have been used by men and women to keep hair clean and free of nits and lice.

24 Goldsmith Street

25 Friars Gate

26 Exe Bridge

27-28 - Wooden combs

Around 1500-1550

From High Street, Exeter

Made of apple and box wood.

29 - Bone ring

Around 1400-1500

From Southernhay, Exeter

This large, heart-shaped ring might have been worn over a glove or to tie a scarf. Offcuts of bone were widely available and so, unlike gold or silver rings, this could have been made by anyone.

30 - Gold ring

Around 1400-1500

From Princesshay, Exeter

Probably a wedding ring as it is inscribed in Norman French 'mon coeur entier', meaning 'my whole heart'. It was found on the site of the Blackfriars church with the burial of a woman.

31 - Gold ring

Around 1300-1400

From near Pinhoe

Most medieval men and women wore rings. This ring is shaped like a flower and is set with a turquoise.

32 - Gold ring

Around 1300

From St Thomas, Exeter

Rings were sometimes worn for superstitious purposes as precious stones were believed to have special powers and meanings. This ring is set with a sapphire which was associated with wisdom, as well as preserving chastity, detecting fraud and curing eye diseases.

33 - Silver signet ring

Around 1400-1500

From Exe Bridge, Exeter

This ring is the type used to seal documents. It is engraved with a letter 'T' beneath a crown with crosses either side.

34 - Silver signet ring

Around 1400-1550

From Stoke Hill, Exeter

The design on this ring is of a knight's plumed helmet.

35 - Wooden scabbard lining

Around 1300-1400

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

Covered with leather, this would have formed a decorative holder for a knife. It is probably made from apple wood.

36 - Leather sheath

Around 1350-1450

From Trichay Street, Exeter

Knives were an important personal possession for medieval folk, used for eating and carrying out numerous other tasks. This decorated leather sheath was a convenient and safe way of carrying a knife about.

37 - Leather sheath

Around 1300-1500

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

Highly decorated both back and front with impressed decoration, this sheath is hardly worn. It seems to have been accidentally slit, perhaps when taking the knife in or out, and then thrown away.

38 - Shoe

Around 1500-1550

From Mermaid Yard, Exeter

A young person's right shoe. It had been repaired several times and was only thrown away when beyond further repair.

39 - Wooden bowl

Around 1500-1550

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

Wooden bowls were the standard eating vessel for this period. Almost everyone would have owned one. This one is made from maple wood.

40-41 - Wooden bowls

Around 1350-1450

From Trichay Street, Exeter

Medieval wooden bowls were made by being turned on a lathe. These two are made from elm wood.

42 - Wooden bowl

Around 1350-1450

From Trichay Street, Exeter

Made from ash wood. There is a cross carved on the underside which is probably a maker's mark.

43 - Mallet

Around 1300-1400

From Friernhay Street, Exeter

A simple wooden tool possibly for beating flax or working wood.

44 - Aquamanile spout

Around 1230-1280

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

An aquamanile is a container for water, often with a decorative spout. This one is in the form of an animal head. It was made in the Doncaster area.

45 - Aquamanile spout

Around 1250-1300

From High Street, Exeter

Another spout in the form of an animal head. This one was made in Lincoln and has a fashionable green glaze.

46 - Roof finial

Around 1300-1500

From South Street, Exeter

This bear would have looked down at passers-by. It decorated the roof of a house on the corner of South Street and Bear Street. Many other houses would have had similar decorations. Analysis of the pottery shows it was made in South Devon, probably Totnes.

47 - Jug

Around 1400-1450

From Queen Street, Exeter

Locally made jug decorated with bands of white slip. The handle is decorated with characteristic stabbing marks.

48 - Bowl

Around 1350-1400

From Trichay Street, Exeter

There are traces of soot on the base of this bowl, suggesting that it had been used on a fire.

49 - Jug

Around 1400-1450

From Queen Street, Exeter

A locally made jug found in a stone-lined well and presumably used to take water from it.

50 - Jug

Around 1250-1300

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

A locally made jug decorated with dot-and-circle marks overpainted with black iron oxide.

51 - Jug

Around 1280-1300

From Wymans Well, Exeter

A locally made jug, boldly decorated with bands of white slip, black iron oxide and thumb marks. From a well near St Stephen's church.

52 - Jug

Around 1300-1370

From Queen Street, Exeter

The chevron decorations on this jug are made from an iron-rich paint. Probably made near Exeter.

53 - Jug

Around 1350-1400

From Exeter

A locally made jug decorated with bands of black iron oxide. The base has traces of soot from a fire.

54 - Jug

Around 1350-1400

From Trichay Street, Exeter

A locally made jug decorated with black iron oxide stripes.

55-56 - Saintonge jugs

Around 1280-1330

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

This pair of jugs with their bright, colourful decoration shows how attractive imported French pottery must have been in comparison with locally produced wares. They would have been the prized possessions of a wealthy household.

57 - Jug

Around 1300-1350

From Goldsmith Street, Exeter

A fine green-glazed jug made in Saintonge, western France.

58 - Jug

Around 1350-1450

From Trichay Street, Exeter

A locally made jug. The beak-shaped spout is similar to the fashionable French jugs.

59 - Coffin pall

Around 1500-1550

From St Mary Arches church, Exeter

This rare medieval textile is an amazing survival. It was made as a set of priest's robes embroidered with figures of saints. At the Reformation, robes of this sort were condemned. But rather than discard this one, the thrifty parishioners of St Mary Arches unpicked the offending figures, which now appear as blank shadows, then cut the cloth into strips and re-assembled the pieces as a pall - a cover for a coffin.

60 - Seal of St Margaret's, Topsham

Around 1400-1500

From St Margaret's Church, Topsham

The bronze seal matrix depicts St Margaret thrusting a cross into the mouth of a dragon. The lettering reads 'S'offics Peccularis ivris Dicc'ois de Toppesham' which refers to St Margaret's status as a 'peculiar' – responsible to the British monarch rather than the Bishop of Exeter.

61-62 - Seal of Prior Thomas Dean

Around 1419

From St James's Priory, Exeter

Thomas Dene became prior of St James in 1419 and this fine silver seal matrix probably marks that occasion. The Priory was small, perhaps only two or three monks. It was sited by the river Exe, about a mile outside the city walls. Nothing from the building is left standing today.

63 - The Exeter Puzzle Jug

Made around 1300

From South Street, Exeter

One of the most impressive pieces of medieval pottery to have been found in England, it was made in the Saintonge region of France.

64 - Ring

Around 1300

From Polsloe Priory, Exeter

This ring was worn by a nun at the Priory. It is a simple affair, made of bronze and with a glass paste setting instead of a precious stone.

65 - Papal bulla

Issued 1281-1285

From Sidbury

A lead seal which authenticated a pronouncement from the Pope. These pronouncements would be copied and sent out throughout the Christian world. This one was issued by Pope Martin IV. On it are depicted the figures of St Peter and St Paul.

66 - Ampulla mould

Around 1400-1500

From Fore Street, Exeter

An ampulla was a lead flask to hold holy water or oil and was often worn like a badge. This is one half of a stone mould used to make them. The fact that ampullae were being made in Exeter suggests the city held a shrine popular with pilgrims.

67 - Holy water stoup

Around 1400-1550

From the College of the Vicars Choral, Exeter

A bowl for holy water, placed near to the door of a chapel so worshippers could dip their fingers into it before crossing themselves. This stoup is made from Beer stone. It was badly damaged in the bombing and fire of 1942.

68 - Alabaster plaque

Around 1400-1500

From Exeter

Depicts the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Beneath the head sits the lamb of John the Baptist, with St Margaret on the left and St Catherine on the right. Alabasters were popular decorations for church altarpieces and tombs. The soft stone enabled the carver to fashion fine detail. Most would have also been painted with bright colours.

Nottingham and Lincoln were the centres for alabaster carving.

69 - Column base

Around 1380-1500

From Blackfriars church, Exeter

Showing a warren with rabbits emerging and disappearing. Rabbits were kept by monasteries as an important source of meat and provider of fur for clothing. However, rabbits were also a medieval symbol for lust and fertility - we still use the term 'breeding like rabbits'.

70-75 - Fragments of screen

Around 1380-1500

From Blackfriars church, Exeter

These painted and gilded fragments show how colourful medieval churches would have been. They were found during the excavations for the Princesshay development in 2006. The Dominican order of Friars were called Black Friars due to their black robes.

76 - Fragment of screen

Around 1380-1500

From Blackfriars church, Exeter

This fragment shows a winged angel. It is carved from a local limestone called Beer stone. It still shows traces of gilding.

77-78 - Inlaid floor-tiles

Around 1300-1350

Probably from Crediton

Elaborate pavements made from tiles such as these were used to decorate church floors. The green colouring comes from copper added to the lead glaze.

79 - Inlaid floor-tile

Around 1300-1350

From the College of the Vicars Choral, Exeter

The pattern is carved on a wooden block which is pushed into the clay tile. The resulting impression is filled with a lighter coloured clay to create two-colour tiles. This one depicts a priest.

80 - Inlaid floor-tile

Around 1280-1330

From Exeter Cathedral

Depicting the royal arms of England. The cathedral's records list the regular purchases of tiles between 1279 and 1326.