

Gatekeepers to Heaven: religion, knowledge and power in medieval Exeter

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The Leofric Missal

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Gatekeepers to Heaven: religion, knowledge and power in medieval Exeter

Exeter is an ancient city with one of the finest medieval cathedrals in England. Its bishops, particularly Leofric (1050-1072) and John Grandisson (1327-1369), amassed a magnificent collection of manuscripts, making the cathedral library a renowned centre of learning in Europe. Medieval bishops were powerful figures in the religious, cultural and political life of the city and country. For many Christians they were truly the gatekeepers to heaven.

This exhibition brings six exceptional medieval manuscripts back to Exeter for the first time in over 400 years. They are on loan from the world-famous Bodleian Library in Oxford, where they form part of the founding collection of 1602. They were once in Exeter cathedral's impressive library. Each manuscript sheds light on the medieval world and Exeter's place in it. They show how powerful words, pictures and books can be, and how they are still relevant in our own times.

Image: Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah. Ms. Bodl. 717, fol v verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

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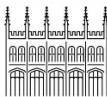
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Medieval Exeter

The Romans established Exeter as the region's military and civic capital. After the Roman army withdrew from Britain, there followed over 400 years of near abandonment for the city. It was not until the 900s that Exeter began to flourish once more. By then it had a population of around 2,000 people, which grew to 8,000 by 1525. Although tiny by modern standards, it was the fifth or sixth largest city in England.

A sizeable population also came to trade, shop and worship in Exeter. The city attracted a diverse community of labourers, merchants and craftspeople, including many immigrants, especially from France. They were described at the time as a 'concourse of strangers' who brought an 'abundance of every kind of merchandise'.

Exeter was not always a peaceful place. During the transition from Saxon to Norman rule, it was a centre of rebellion until crushed by William I's army in 1068. In 1290, the entire Jewish population of the city was expelled on the king's orders.

Image: John Hooker's 16th century map of the Cathedral Close
© The Dean & Chapter of Exeter Cathedral

Leofric: the first Bishop of Exeter, 1050–1072

Little is known about Leofric's childhood. One early historian called him 'British' (*Brytonicus*) and so he may have been Cornish or Welsh. He was educated in northern France and was part of the royal household of the exiled King Edward the Confessor. On Edward's return to England, Leofric was the king's choice to serve as Bishop of Cornwall and Bishop of Crediton.

In France, bishops usually had their cathedrals (episcopal seats) in cities. Therefore, in 1050 Leofric was granted papal permission to move his seat from the small town of Crediton to Exeter. He united the dioceses of Crediton and Cornwall to form the diocese of Exeter.

Leofric was energetic in providing funds for his new cathedral. He increased his revenue by adding land in Oxfordshire and Dawlish to that which the king had already given him. He also provided the cathedral with ornaments, vestments and, of course, all of the necessary manuscripts.

Image: Bishop Leofric, Exeter, 1907 lantern slide, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery

John Grandisson: Reforming Bishop of Exeter, 1327–1369

Grandisson was born near Hereford and as a young man spent time in France. He was educated at the University of Paris and was chaplain to the Pope at Avignon. He came to Exeter at a time of disarray: his predecessor had been murdered and the new cathedral only partly built. He also lived through the height of the Black Death when nearly half the clergy died of the disease.

Grandisson was a voracious reader. He brought many manuscripts to Exeter, often concerned with the lives of the saints, and added copious notes in the margins of older books. He found the pattern of worship in Exeter old-fashioned and sought to modernise it. His *Ordinal* of 1337 decreed which saints' days were to be given most importance, including the Virgin Mary, St Thomas Becket and local ones such as Petroc, Sidwell and Brannoc.

From what we know of Grandisson he was quite a severe man. He grumbled at the clergy's fondness for hawking and hunting, noting that some had 'their bodies in the choir but their hearts in the market-place, or in the street, or in bed'. Some were guilty of laughter; others even dripped molten candlewax onto the heads of those sitting in front of them! Even the child choristers had to work long hours and 'should always be engaged in some good task'.

Image: Seal of Bishop John Grandisson, Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery

Roof boss from the Bishop's Palace, Exeter

About 1330

Oak

The Bishop's Palace was once the largest and grandest house in Exeter. It was enlarged and improved by Bishop Grandisson. This wooden boss is part of an ornate oak ceiling designed by the noted architect Thomas of Witney and the cathedral's master carpenter. The only parts of the building to survive are four roof bosses: this one and three in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Exeter Cathedral and its library

The impressive cathedral we see today is not the first building on the site. The Romans used the area as the centre of their military and civilian settlements. A church with a cemetery probably existed in the 400s, and this seems to have become a monastery under an abbot named Wulfhard in the late 600s.

As Exeter grew in size and status, it deserved a new church. Around 930, the monastery was re-founded by King Aethelstan as a *minster* church. In 1971, archaeologists found foundations for the minster when excavating under the demolished parish church of St Mary Major. There was further royal involvement when King Eadgar reintroduced monks to Exeter in 968 under the rule of Sideman (who had been tutor to his son).

A major change occurred in 1050 when Leofric became the first Bishop of Exeter and the minster became his cathedral. Leofric's cathedral occupied the buildings of the Anglo-Saxon minster. A new cathedral building was started in 1114 and was in use by 1133. The third and largest cathedral, the one there now, was started in the 1270s and completed in the 1340s.

Image: John Hooker's 16th century map of the Cathedral Close
© The Dean & Chapter of Exeter Cathedral

The Library

The cathedral's manuscripts were not originally stored in a library, but in chests alongside other treasures. In 1400, a section of the newly completed cloisters became the first library building with one of the clergy acting as librarian. This area was secure, with a door at either end, meaning that the library was not publicly accessible. The books were chained on desks with more stored beneath. By 1506, there were 11 desks in the library holding 327 books, including bibles, works on law, dictionaries and books on medicine, science and history. There were works by Jewish and Islamic as well as Christian scholars.

The library was amassed over centuries by Exeter's learned bishops, in particular Leofric (1050-1072) and Grandisson (1327-1369). Bishop Leofric donated 66 manuscripts to the Cathedral in the 11th century. 21 manuscripts survive but all but one (the Exeter Book) have left Exeter; seven survive at the Bodleian Library. The whereabouts of the other 45 or so manuscripts is unknown. Bishop Grandisson also donated a large number of manuscripts to the Cathedral Library in the 14th century and many others in the Bodleian were annotated by him.

Image: Psalter, with gloss of Peter Lombard. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 8, fol 212 verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Thomas Bodley and the Bodleian Library

The next phase in the manuscripts' history comes with Exeter-born scholar, diplomat and book-lover, Sir Thomas Bodley. He re-established the university library at Oxford at the beginning of the 17th century. His vision, governance and keen regard for the importance of preserving and studying literary heritage, laid the foundations for one of the world's greatest research libraries.

In 1602, the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral donated at least 80 (and possibly nearer 100) manuscripts to Bodley's new library. It was the library's largest founding donation.

Negotiations may have begun when William Cotton, Bishop of Exeter from 1598 to 1621, visited Bodley's library in March 1602. William Cotton was related to the antiquarian Sir Robert Cotton, who at the same time was founding the Cottonian Library which formed the basis of the British Library. Thomas Bodley's brother, Laurence, an Ex Canon of Exeter, probably facilitated the gift of books from Exeter to Oxford.

Image: Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah. Ms. Bodl. 717, fol 002 recto © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

The Cathedral cat

Between 1305 and 1467 the cathedral's records note a quarterly payment of 13d (about £30 in today's money) 'to the custors and the cat'. In 1384 the treasurer, Robert Broke, protested to the archbishop of Canterbury that he was having to pay annually 4s. 4d. (about £125) 'for the cat'. A cat would have been extremely useful in keeping the cathedral clear of rats, mice and birds but it is rare to find such good evidence of it. The payments suggest that the cat got a regular supply of food to go along with any prey it caught.

Image: Guardbook of fragments. Ms. Douce 5, fol 044 recto © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

The Power of Saints

Among a cathedral's greatest treasures were its relics. These were tangible, physical objects which made it easier for people to relate to Christianity. Relics were imbued with the power of the saints who could negotiate on your behalf in the kingdom of heaven but also guard against illness and misfortune on earth.

Exeter had the most important collection of relics in Devon and Cornwall: 146, reportedly given by King Aethelstan, are listed in the Leofric Gospels. They included rare and desirable items, such as parts of Jesus' manger, cross and tomb; a fragment of the table from the last supper; a lock of the Virgin Mary's hair, a piece of St Peter's beard, a fragment of the Burning Bush and a stone from Mount Sinai. These relics are international in nature, proclaiming Exeter's position in the Christian world. There were also relics from local saints such as St Sidwell of Exeter and Petroc of Bodmin.

The written or spoken word could be equally powerful. By invoking the name of a saint, or by singing or saying an incantation, you could summon spiritual and physical aid. People wore rings or brooches inscribed with saints' names and religious phrases that acted as charms.

The contents of Exeter's library shows that theology, science, magic and medicine were all valued. Alongside Christian books there was an Arabic text on magical gemstones and inside

Leofric's copy of the poems of Prudentius (on display in this exhibition), a charm against nosebleeds has been added in Old English.

Image: Augustine. *De civitate dei*. Ms. Bodl. 691, fol 001 verso
© The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Replica wax votives

Original about 1500

From Exeter Cathedral

The tomb of Bishop Lacy was one of the sites in Exeter visited by pilgrims. Lacy died in 1455 and was known as a devout figure who popularised the worship of saints, particularly female ones. Pilgrims would pray at his tomb to relieve illness and ailments, leaving wax figures to aide their cause. In 1943 a cache of these figures was found – an amazing survival for objects that were never meant to last long.

These replicas are cast in beeswax from moulds made from 3D scans of the originals.

On loan from the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral
3D scans and models produced by Digital Humanities Lab,
University of Exeter

Lead holy water container

Between 1100 and 1300

Metal-detector find by Simon Wildman near Whimble

Medieval pilgrims pinned small lead flasks of holy water to their clothing rather like a badge. The flask, or *ampulla*, was often shell-shaped and showed that you were a pilgrim but also protected you against misfortunes on your journey.

Stone *ampulla* mould

Between 1200 and 1500

Excavated from High Street, Exeter

Medieval pilgrims came to Exeter, probably to visit the shrines of St Sidwell and St Peter. This stone mould for making lead *ampullae* or holy water containers suggests that there was a small scale industry making objects for pilgrims to take away with them.

The Pilton Prior's gold ring set with a sapphire

About 1200 to 1300

Found in Pilton, North Devon

This exquisite ring was found under a tree close to Pilton churchyard in 1867. It has two inscriptions, one inside the band in Latin which translates as 'With us is Jesus the Lord'; the other in Hebrew around the gemstone which translates as 'God Elohim Jehovah Jesus may be with us'. Sapphires were thought to be a charm against diseases of the eye and were sometimes used in bishop's rings. This ring may have been owned by an apostate Jew (one no longer practising as a Jew) or by a learned Christian who wished to display his knowledge of Hebrew and had a strong belief in the power of sapphires.

Courtesy of the North Devon Athenaeum

Gold ring with Tau cross

About 1400

Metal-detector find near Exeter

This gold ring is decorated with T-shaped crosses – also known as Tau crosses. The Tau cross was a symbol of St Anthony, who was thought to protect against illness and misfortune, particularly St Anthony's fire, or holy fire, which is a form of grain poisoning. The cult of St Anthony seems to have been strong in south-west Britain.

Gold ring with Tau cross

About 1400

Metal-detector find near Moretonhampstead

Purchased with support from the Friends of RAMM

St Anne silver ring

Between 1200 and 1400

Metal-detector find near Ottery St Mary

This ring is inscribed '+ANNA . MATER . S MARIE' which refers to St Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. The cult of St Anne celebrated both family life and literacy. She is often shown teaching Mary how to read, emphasising the importance of female education. Such a scene can be found in the Speke Chapel of Exeter Cathedral.

Silver ring with Hebrew inscription

Between 1200 and 1400

Metal-detector find near Ottery St Mary

This simple silver ring is inscribed +A+G+L+A+A which probably represents the Hebrew expression 'Atha Gebri Leilan Adonai' (Thou art mighty forever, O Lord). The inscription has amuletic significance and was invoked as a charm against fever during the Middle Ages. The use of Hebrew may have been seen as giving the charm extra, almost magical, power.

Gold ring with inset gemstone

Between 1300 and 1400

Metal-detector find by Ian McFadzean near Pinhoe

Gemstones and minerals had symbolic meanings in the medieval world. The Exeter Cathedral library contained an Arabic lapidary: a manuscript listing the medical, magical and spiritual properties of gems. This ring is probably set with a garnet, which has a deep red colour linked to the blood of Christ and female life force.

Green man face carved in stone

About 1500

Excavated from Berry Pomeroy Castle, Totnes

The foliage carved around the head and sprouting from the nose suggests that this is a carving of a green man. These figures represent fertility or rebirth and are often found as stone or wood carvings in churches.

Stone fragment depicting a rabbit warren

About 1500

Excavated from Princesshay, Exeter

This carving on a section of column or plinth represents rabbits in a warren. It came from the Blackfriars or Dominican friary which was founded in 1232 and dissolved in 1538. This carving, along with a carved stone screen was probably smashed in the demolition of 1539.

Keeping rabbits in warrens was an important economic resource for religious houses and this may explain the presence of the carving in the church. While depictions of rabbits and hares are commonly found in medieval manuscripts, this stone carving of a warren is unique.

Animal head handle carved in stone

Between 1300 and 1400

Excavated from Smythen Street, Exeter

Much medieval food was prepared for cooking by pounding in a mortar: a bowl usually made of stone or metal. This is a fragment of such a bowl. The handle appears as a tongue sticking out of the mouth of a cat-like beast.

Carved stone capital with four heads

Between 1100 and 1200

From South Street, Exeter

This capital comes from a column. It was recovered from the site of the Black Lion Inn in 1873. The sculpted head on each of its faces appears to be wearing a hood of chain mail and so may represent crusading knights. The Black Lion Inn was on the site of the Prior of Plympton's house and so the carving was probably originally associated with this wealthy monastery.

Incredible Beasts of the Medieval

Imagination

The cathedral library was well stocked with books on science and medicine so users could study the world about them. Creatures, familiar and exotic, populate pages of other manuscripts, appearing in margins and entwining around letters. Some of them come from the imagination, but others were thought to really exist in faraway lands.

The psalter in this exhibition has wonderful illustrations of beasts. Its hares, lions and apes are familiar to us, but the hybrid creatures, such as centaurs and mermen, seem strange. Griffins were mythological monsters with the head and wings of eagles and bodies of lions. An inventory of Exeter cathedral's treasures in 1327 lists 'three griffin eggs' which suggests people thought they were real creatures. (Sadly two of the eggs were recorded as broken!)

Monsters and other creatures were used as symbols for medieval moral values, acting as warnings to readers. Mermaids symbolised temptation, while centaurs could both be wise protectors but also devilish. Such exotic creatures were probably too rare to cause that much anxiety. Demons, however, were monsters that were genuinely feared. They were thought to lurk in the shadows and around every corner.

They certainly inhabit the manuscripts where their bodies snake around the page, entangle letters and gnash their teeth.

The Leofric Missal (in this exhibition) contains an exorcism for protection against monsters and possession by the devil. Not all monsters are terrifying. Some seem to poke fun at a serious piece of text, while others are too decorative to be scary.

Image: Psalter, with gloss of Peter Lombard. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 8, fol 183 verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Incredible Beasts

Slideshow running time: 3 minutes 39 seconds

This slideshow depicts illustrations of beasts and mythical creatures from the following manuscripts:

Psalter, with gloss of Peter Lombard. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 8, fols. 001r, 003r, 056r, 088v, 115r, 147v, 147r, 183v (details)

Leofric Gospels. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 16, fols. 71v, 101v (details)

Homilies on the Gospel of St. John.
MS Bodl. 301, fol 004r

Augustine. De civitate dei. Ms. Bodl. 691, fols. 001r, 011r, 32v, 42v, 84v, 118v, 137v, 206v (details)

Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles.
MS Bodl. 725, fol. 132v

© The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

The Art of Medieval Manuscripts

Many manuscripts have been lost or destroyed over the centuries but the ones that survive are like windows into the medieval world and its imagination. The view through the window can be opaque and the manuscripts are hard for most of us to read in a conventional sense. They are written in languages we no longer speak – Latin, Old English, medieval French – but they were just as unreadable to most Exeter people 1,000 years ago as well. However, by looking at their design, illumination and calligraphy we can ‘read’ them in different ways.

Making a manuscript

Video running time: 2 minutes 57 seconds

This film shows excerpts from the following short videos from the *Making Manuscripts* series created by The British Library:

Oak Gall Ink

Quills

Vellum

The Page

Pigments

Paint

Making miniatures

You can watch the full-length videos here:

[Videos | The British Library \(bl.uk\)](#)

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Bibliothèque nationale de France, 700–1200*, funded by The
Polonsky Foundation. [https://www.bl.uk/medieval-english-
french-manuscripts](https://www.bl.uk/medieval-english-french-manuscripts)



Scribes

In medieval times manuscripts (books written by hand) were incredibly valuable. They were made from expensive materials: parchment for pages; gold-leaf, inks and pigments for text and illustrations. Perhaps even more costly was the amount of time and skill they took to write and illuminate. This was the work of a scribe. It was a specialist job, and the most skilled were highly sought after.

There is a rare depiction of a scribe in one of the Exeter manuscripts featured in this exhibition. Even rarer, we know his name – Hugo Pictor (Hugo the Painter). It is the first named self-portrait in British art. Most scribes were monks and Hugo probably worked in a monastery in Normandy in the 11th century.

Other scribes are shown in the Exeter manuscripts. Some worked on bibles and gospels, others, like Hugo, were writers and copiers of earlier medieval manuscripts. Scribes are often shown with the tools of their trade. In one hand they hold a quill pen, often being dipped into an ink-horn; in the other a knife for scoring lines to lay out the page and for scraping out mistakes. They often sit on benches, which are easier to slide along to keep the line of calligraphy in order.

Image: Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah. Ms. Bodl. 717, fol vi verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Take a picture of yourself with Hugo

When Hugo the Painter drew himself as a scribe he created the first named self-portrait in British art.

Image: Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah. Ms. Bodl. 717, fol 287 verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

The Power of Church and State

Medieval Exeter was a bustling city. Life for most people centred on everyday activities that we are familiar with today. However, the influence of religion and the church, king and state, was ever-present. That power was visible through Exeter Castle on one side and the soaring cathedral and parish churches on the other. Exeter's bishops had to perform a careful balancing act between the power of church and state. Often they had a foot in both camps.

There are pictures of kings and queens throughout the manuscripts. These tend to be biblical figures shown as medieval royalty but they also represent the kings and queens who feature in Exeter's history. On 9 November 932, Aethelstan brought all the most important people in his realm to Exeter. It was an impressive gathering with three Welsh princes, two archbishops, 17 bishops and 18 nobility.

Anglo-Saxon kings such as Aethelstan, Eadgar and Edward the Confessor acted as founders and benefactors to the cathedral. Queen Isabella lobbied hard for her chaplain to be appointed to a post in Exeter. Most of Exeter's medieval bishops were king's men: they were recommended by him and had often worked for him.

Image: Psalter, with gloss of Peter Lombard. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 8, fol 001 recto © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Exeter puzzle jug

About 1300

Excavated from South Street, Exeter

This jug is perhaps the most celebrated example of medieval imported pottery in England, and one of the most extraordinary pieces of medieval ceramics anywhere in northern Europe. Made in the Saintonge region of western France, around 1300, it was discovered in fragments in South Street, Exeter, in 1899.

'Puzzle jugs' were made as trick jugs, designed to pour their contents over the unsuspecting drinker. Despite its intricate appearance, the Exeter example is not strictly a puzzle jug as it lacks the concealed holes which caused the liquid to spill out. In this example, liquid would be poured into the upper chamber, flowing down through the hollow handle into the bottom chamber, allowing it to be drunk without spills.

The jug shows a tower in which there are two bishops holding croziers, while young ladies lean out of the windows and musicians play below. Did a bishop with a sense of humour or someone who wanted to poke fun at the Church own the jug? At this time, the morals of Exeter's clergy were actively being satirised by the Bishops of Brothelyingham, a group who were half way between an anarchic street theatre troupe and terrorists.

They staged mock religious processions, kidnapped people and demanded ransoms. We know that Bishop Grandisson had them investigated but we don't know what, if any, punishments were meted out.

Silver penny of King Eadgar

Between 973 and 975

Made at the Lydford Mint by the moneyer Aethelred

King Eadgar (959-975) proclaimed himself king of all England and introduced a new coinage which featured a royal portrait. Here, he is depicted in the style of a Roman emperor. During his reign, Eadgar encouraged a monastic revival and identified Exeter as a place suitable for monks to join the clergy.

Purchased with support from the Reynolds Chard bequest and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

Silver penny of King Aethelred II

Between 997 and 1003

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Goda

During Aethelred's reign England was invaded by Vikings from Denmark. According to the histories recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle they fought a battle at Pinhoe in 1001 and returned in 1003 to raid Exeter where they 'utterly laid waste the borough and seized much plunder there'.

Silver penny of King Aethelred II

Between 1003 and 1009

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Manna

Aethelred is shown wearing a helmet, perhaps trying to depict himself as a warrior king.

Silver penny of King Cnut

Between 1017 and 1024

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Goda

Cnut was the son of Swegn Forkbeard, King of Denmark. Initially he was ruler of the Viking occupied area of England but came ruler of all England when he married Emma of Normandy, Aethelred's widow.

Purchased with support from the Art Fund and the Reynolds Chard bequest.

Silver penny of King Cnut

Between 1024 and 1030

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Goda

Cnut is shown here wearing a pointed style of helmet.

Purchased with support from Devon County Council

Silver penny of King Harthacnut

Between 1040 and 1042

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Dodda

Harthacnut was Cnut's son. He argued with Harold, his half-brother, about who should be king of England.

Silver penny of King Edward the Confessor

Between 1050 and 1053

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Edwine

Edward was the son of Aethelred and Emma of Normandy and therefore half-brother to Harthacnut. His rule was a return to the lineage of Anglo-Saxon kings who had their roots in Wessex (Western England) rather than in Denmark.

Purchased with support from the Art Fund and the Reynolds Chard bequest

Silver penny of King Edward the Confessor

Between 1059 and 1062

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Lifing

Bishop Leofric had served in Edward's household before being appointed by him as Bishop of Exeter. King Edward and Queen Edith of Wessex travelled to Exeter in 1050 to attend Leofric's enthronement ceremony.

Purchased with support from the Kent Kingdon bequest

Silver penny of King William I

Between 1070 and 1072

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Saeward

William I (the Conqueror) was Edward the Confessor's cousin and invaded England from Normandy. In 1066, following his victory at the Battle of Hastings, he became the first of the Norman kings of England.

Silver penny of King William I

Between 1072 and 1074

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Saewine

In 1068 there was a revolt in western England against Norman rule. William travelled to Exeter at the head of an army to defeat the rebels. He ordered the building of Exeter castle to ensure that the area stayed under his control.

Purchased with support from the Reynolds Chard bequest and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund

Silver penny of King William II

Between 1087 and 1100

Made at the Exeter Mint by the moneyer Saewine

William was the second son of William I and inherited the English crown on his father's death. Either William II or his father ordered a payment of one penny to each of Exeter's chaplains from funds raised by the Exeter market.

Purchased with support from the Friends of RAMM

Seal of the Chapter of Exeter Cathedral

First used in 1133

Wax

The seal shows the front of a church. The earliest example of its use is on a document of 1133. At that date, the Norman cathedral's towers were not yet built, and the older Saxon cathedral was still standing. The depiction could show the Saxon cathedral but it is very uncertain whether such depictions were anything like the buildings they symbolised.

Seal matrix for the Common Seal of the City of Exeter

Between 1170 and 1200

Silver

This is the oldest surviving seal known from an English town or city. Its inscription reads 'SIGILLVM CIVITATIS EXONIE' (the seal of the city of Exeter). In the centre, there is an elaborate building between a pair of towers – symbols of wealth and security, rather than depictions of a specific building. The seal

was the medieval equivalent of a credit card, used to show that the city had given its authority to any transaction. It was kept at the Guildhall.

Seal of Bishop John Grandisson

Between 1327 and 1369

Wax

John Grandisson (1292-1369) became Bishop of Exeter in 1327, and served for 42 years. This fine seal was used to authenticate documents in his name and is a good example of the high aesthetic standards he brought to Exeter.

Music

Music was a key part of medieval church services and this is reflected in the Bodleian manuscripts which are full of musical notation and pictures of musicians (some more fantastical than others). A service at the cathedral would have lasted for hours and much of it was sung. In Leofric's time, the singing would have been in the ancient tradition of plainchant: unaccompanied solo voices or a call and response between a solo singer and a choir. When John Grandisson came to Exeter, he brought in more multi-part music, called polyphony. The cathedral's architectural improvements meant that the sound of singing and instruments would have echoed around its enormous spaces.

The congregation did not join in with singing during services. Clerics and choristers did this. The singing was led by the most skilled clerics and it was a specialised role as the polyphonic singing became more complex. Exeter had 14 boy choristers, and they must have been of high quality as in the 1530s there were attempts to poach them for the royal chapel.

It's hard to get a sense of Exeter's musical life away from its churches but in a busy, rowdy city there must have been plenty. The manuscripts show people (and creatures) playing a variety of instruments, including: vielles (fiddles), sackbuts (horns), shawms (like a bassoon), gemshorns (flutes) and bagpipes.

Archaeologists have found simple pipes and whistles made from bird bones, so music could have been made by almost anyone.

Images: Augustine. *De civitate dei*. Ms. Bodl. 691, fol 001 recto and The Leofric Missal. Ms. Bodl. 579, fol 339 verso (detail)

French Connection

Exeter had a flourishing shipping trade from the 12th century, much of it with northern France. This flow of people, goods and ideas can be traced in the manuscripts. Both Leofric and Grandisson had strong personal and family links to France and so when they required the best manuscripts they tended to look to French sources. Many of the manuscripts were written in French monasteries or by French-trained monks living in England.

Exeter was one of the largest importers of French wine in medieval England, particularly in the 13th and 14th centuries. Fine French pottery was shipped to Exeter alongside cargoes of wine; the remains of many of these pots have been found by archaeologists. Intriguingly, a French potter may also have been working in Exeter. In 1931 the remains of a kiln was discovered that specialised in making fine unglazed cooking pots from the 10th and 11th centuries. The pots are quite unlike anything else from the South West but are similar to ones from northern France. It seems that a French potter, or someone trained in France, brought their skills to Exeter at that time.

Image: Leofric Gospels. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 16, fol 71 verso © The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Two eras of French art

Manuscripts were often added to and improved. In the Leofric Gospels the images of the evangelists show how French art styles changed over time. The top two images were made in Landévennec Abbey, Brittany in about 920. The bottom two were made in the Saint-Omer Abbey of St Bertin around 1050.

Images: Leofric Gospels. Ms. Auct. D. 2. 16, fol 28 verso, fol 71 verso, fol 72 verso, fol 146 recto

Fragments of pottery storage jars

Between 950 and 1100

Excavated from the Bedford Garage kiln in Exeter

During excavations in 1935, just within the city wall on the site of the then Bedford Garage (now the top of Princesshay), an abandoned pottery kiln was found. In the 1970s it was realised that the kiln and its pottery waste were late Saxon in date.

At a time when much of Anglo-Saxon England was using crude, hand-made pottery, and the use of any sort of pottery was only slowly being adopted in western Britain, the pottery made here was of a different type and of very high quality. The so-called Bedford Garage ware was refined, wheel-thrown, fired in a kiln and sometimes glazed. Similar types of pottery were found in northern France and it seems likely that the potter came from there. They must have been a valued member of the community as the kiln was built inside the city wall when most potteries operated in the countryside.

Wedge of fired clay covered in fingerprints

Between 950 and 1100

Excavated from the Bedford Garage kiln, Exeter

Are these the fingerprints of a French potter working in Exeter? This little wedge of clay was used in the Bedford Garage kiln to secure pots while they were being fired. It is covered in the potter's fingerprints.

Three Saintonge pottery jugs

Between 1250 and 1350

Excavated from Smythen Street, Exeter

Medieval Exeter had strong trading links with France. The import of French wine was accompanied by a busy trade in pottery, especially from Saintonge in western France. A remarkable 10% of pottery in use in Exeter seems to have been from Saintonge and this wasn't restricted to the wealthiest households.

Two Saintonge pottery jugs from a well

Between 1350 and 1450

Excavated from Princesshay, Exeter

By the 15th century, fewer pots were imported into Exeter from Saintonge. These two examples were excavated from the bottom layers of a well, which was packed with the remains of over 80 locally made jugs. Intriguingly, both of these vessels have neat notches cut into their handles, possibly to mark a production batch or even to help in tying on a rope to lower down the well.

Exeter pottery jug with French features

Between 1350 and 1450

Excavated from Princesshay, Exeter

Some of the features of Saintonge pottery influenced the local Devon potters. The distinctive beak-shaped spout of this vessel seems to copy the French examples.

Pottery jug rim decorated with faces

Excavated from Trichay Street, Exeter

Between 1200 and 1300

With a ring of faces staring out from the rim, this jug would have made a striking centrepiece to a table. It was made in Bristol, a relatively rare source of pottery found in Exeter.

Sherd from lustreware pottery bowl

Between 1425 and 1475

Excavated from Colleton Crescent, Exeter

This bowl was charged with the power of Jesus' name. The initials 'HIS' stand for Iesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus the Saviour of men). This sacred trigram was found on many religious items, showing that powerful words were not restricted to manuscripts. This fragment was excavated from the site of a Franciscan Friary at Colleton Crescent.

Lustreware was developed in the Islamic World and when it was seen in northern Europe it was greatly prized. The most important source of this pottery was in Valencia, southern Spain.

The Leofric Missal

Made in Canterbury and Exeter

Between about 850 and 1070

Given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Bodl. 579

Opening at folio 60 verso

**Conserved and rebound as two volumes by Sabina Pugh,
2006-7**

This is a large book that brings together many of the texts necessary for the work of a bishop. It was given to Exeter Cathedral by its first bishop, Leofric, and is inscribed in Latin and Old English: 'Bishop Leofric gives this missal to the Church of Saint Peter the Apostle in Exeter for the use of his successors. If anyone shall take it away from thence, let him lie under eternal malediction'. The contents include masses, blessings, exorcisms, chants, calendars and computational tables for working out the date of important ceremonies and rituals, such as Easter.

This section of the missal is open at a splendid example of a full page, ornate capital letter 'V'. This is the start of the preface of the canon mass, a solemn thanksgiving for all the blessings of God, and begins 'Vere dignum et justum est, æquum et salutáre' (It is truly meet and just, right for our salvation),

The Leofric Missal

Made in Canterbury and Exeter

Between about 850 and 1070

Given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Bodl. 579

Opening at folio 339 verso

**Conserved and rebound as two volumes by Sabina Pugh,
2006-7**

The manuscript sums up Leofric's ability to straddle both the Anglo-Saxon and Norman French worlds.

The missal was already an old book when it came to Exeter. It was a working document and in many ways a work in progress. Its history can be divided into three phases. Phase 1 (so-called Leofric A) was probably carried out by French monks working in Canterbury, starting around 850. Phase 2 (so-called Leofric B), also written in Canterbury, was added by monks trained in Glastonbury. Phase 3 (so-called Leofric C) has additions in Latin and Old English from Leofric's time in Exeter.

This opening is one of the parts produced in Exeter. It lists prayers and masses. This page is one of the many that has musical notes added to the text to aid a priest to sing the liturgy.

Leofric Gospels

**Made at Landévennec Abbey, Brittany, with later additions
from St Bertin and Exeter**

Between about 920 and 1070

Given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Auct.D.2.16

Opening at folio 146 recto

When Leofric arrived in Exeter as its first bishop, he sought to give the new cathedral all the resources it needed. He used his experience of working in France to source necessary books. This one came from Landévennec Abbey in Brittany. It was written in Latin and contained the gospels of St Mark, St John, St Matthew and St Luke, who are depicted with animal-headed portraits – a lion for Mark, an eagle for John, a human/angel for Matthew and a calf for Luke. Around a century later, further French additions were made to the manuscript, including the portrait of St John displayed here. During Leofric's time in Exeter the manuscript was used to record records of relics and deeds of land belonging to the cathedral. These were added to the front of the manuscript and are written in Old English.

**Prudentius. Various works, with added charms in Old English
Made in England
Before 1072
Given to Exeter Cathedral by Bishop Leofric**

**The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Auct. F.3.6
Opening at fol iiiv**

This is a collection of works in Latin by the Roman Christian poet, philosopher and politician Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-413). His writings appealed to the medieval love of using symbolism in writing and art.

The manuscript shows the interrelation between religion, magic and medicine in the medieval world. At some point during its life in Exeter someone has added charms written in Old English. On this page, the charm is to protect against nosebleeds and begins 'Gif men ierne blod of nebbe to swiðe'. This is followed by an inscription in Latin, 'Hunc librum dat Leofricus ...' and in Old English, 'Ðat boc gef Leofric ...', recording the gift of the manuscript to Exeter by Bishop Leofric.

Jerome. Commentary on Isaiah

Made at Jumiègue Abbey, Normandy

Around 1060 to 1090

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS. Bodl. 717

Opening at folio v verso

This impressive manuscript is a copy of a commentary in Latin by Saint Jerome on the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The left side folio presented here shows the prophet Isaiah seated in a temple with a great city (probably Jerusalem) behind him. The writing on his scroll reads 'ISIAS P[ROPHETA, ECCE VIRGO CONCIPIET ET PARIET FILIUM, ET VOCABITUR NOMEN EI[US] EMMANUEL' (Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel). The right side folio depicts Jerome, named as 'HIERONIM[US]' (full name Eusebius Hieronymus) and 'EUSTOCHIUS' (Eustacius), a saint and abbot to whom the work was dedicated. The text below in decorative capitals can be translated as 'Here begins the first book of Saint Jerome the priest on Isaiah the prophet'. The manuscript continues to be sumptuously decorated throughout. Towards the end is the wonderful self-portrait of the scribe and artist Hugo Pictor (Hugo the Painter).

The manuscript probably came to England from Normandy around 1090 and was one of the first copies of this work in the country. It was part of the modernisation of cathedrals and their libraries carried out by the Norman kings and their bishops. The book was certainly in Exeter in 1327 as it appears

in the library catalogue, valued at 13 shilling, 4 pence: the fine you would have to pay if you lost the book. (This is roughly equivalent to £310 today.) Bishop Grandisson also labelled it as part of the Exeter Cathedral Library. In 1506 it was the ninth book on the ninth desk in the library.

Augustine. De civitate dei

Main manuscript produced in Normandy with later additions in Exeter

Originally 1050 to 1120 with many coloured initial and capital letters added around 1300 to 1400

**The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Bodl. 691
Opening at folio 32 verso**

This is a copy of 'The city of God' written by the North African philosopher Augustine of Hippo in around AD 430. It sees human history as a battle between the Earthly City, populated by those who indulge in the pleasures of the present, and the City of God, those who resist those pleasures and dedicate themselves to the church and a spiritual life.

This version was written in Normandy and then, perhaps 200 years later, decoration was added in England by at least two scribes. The decoration was probably ordered by Bishop Grandisson, to bring the manuscript up to the standard he required. Grandisson also inserted a section with his notes and a table of contents.

Psalter, with gloss of Peter Lombard

Made in France, probably Paris

Between 1150 and 1200

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Ms. Auct. D.2.8

Opening at folio 115 recto

A psalter contained the Old Testament book of the Psalms along with other prayers. 12th-century versions, like this one, were often produced with commentaries, or 'glosses', which brought out the meaning to the reader. Peter Lombard (d. 1160) worked in Notre Dame, Paris, and produced one of the most popular glosses of the time. The original text of the psalm was laid out on one side of the page with a much longer gloss on the other.

The Exeter version has particularly colourful decorated initials full of biblical characters and intriguing beasts. The folio on display depicts four hares running around the inside of a letter 'Q' for 'Quid gloriaris' (What glory). The movement of the hares is emphasised by a visual trick – each one is linked by sharing an ear with its neighbour. The image of the conjoined hares is an ancient one and was adopted by Devon's tin miners and carved on Dartmoor churches.