

Blue Plaques

- Initially a scheme for London instigated by the Society of Arts in 1866. It was variously run by the Society, LCC, GLC and English Heritage.
- The English Heritage scheme just produces plaques for people and events, with strict criteria for selection.
- However, the scheme has inspired many similar schemes to be set up and run by other organisations, including local councils, heritage groups and societies, such as the Transport Trust and the Royal Society of Chemistry. Exeter Civic Society has a blue plaque scheme for the city.
- Plaques schemes therefore cover not only people, but also events, buildings and sites of historic interest or significance. It is in this latter capacity that we want you to think about your plaques.
- They do not have to be dedicated to a specific person, but could commemorate an event, building or item with a global link.

Possible Plaque Subjects

- *People* – People are the obvious subject for plaques and many of last year’s Global Lives students did chose a specific person for their plaque. These covered individuals who had a global link through their trade or profession to those who emigrated from Exeter to other countries and became prominent in some way in their new life. Your person doesn’t have to be from Exeter, they could be a visitor as there were individuals who visited the city who brought a global perspective to Exeter citizens – for example visitors who included Exeter on a lecture tour to highlight the conditions of slavery. This latter type of visitor can also link to events.
- *Events*- Events could include lectures, protests or electioneering which linked to a global cause, such as slavery or free trade. It could also include events which somehow linked the city with the wider world, such as voyages or expeditions which started from the city. You could also use cultural events and visits which opened the eyes of Exonians to the world – musicians were an example used last year.
- *Buildings* - Buildings make good subjects, either via the events which took place or their content. The DEI itself could be a subject for a plaque, with its global connections via its members and its role in opening up the wider world to members through the books, periodicals and newspapers that it stocked. The latter could themselves be an object for a plaque, as they brought the global world to the

members of the DEI and reported on things like commodity prices and global conditions.

- *Objects, specimens and artefacts* – All of these things can represent links to global trade or culture. They do not have to be inanimate objects, you could also use living specimens. For example, some of the trees on the university campus were some of the first of their kind brought into the UK, as it was fashionable in the 19th century to plant gardens with exotic specimens. They represent the opening up of the trade in plants and trees on a global scale and could be linked with specific people or businesses, such as nurseries and plant collectors, or could concentrate specifically on the plant or tree and its significance (pineapples last year).
- *Collections* - The DEI was not initially just a library, but also housed a museum collection, with members donating specimens brought back from their travels. These including sledges from polar expeditions, religious icons from the far east and archaeological/natural history specimens. This collection went on to form the basis of the collection held at the RAMM at its inception and can still be seen there today. There is a small exhibition in the foyer of the DEI detailing the connection between the RAMM and DEI collection, which may give you some inspiration for your research.
- *Trades and Professions* – Exeter and Topsham were ports and prominent merchant families traded on a global scale in commodities such as wine and spirits, fruit and tobacco. Likewise, the exporting of goods, such as wool cloth, could be a further global link to inspire your research. The DEI/RAMM collections also offer ways of thinking about connections on a global scale. The sledges of William Parry, donated from his polar expeditions, offer a connection through exploration. The DEI's collection of both early travel books and natural history give windows into global travel and exploration, often undertaken in the name of science and discovery. The items donated by Francis Godolphin Bond from his Naval expeditions remind us to look for connections through the civil and armed services – the Navy and Army and the Civil Service. The latter often provides links through colonialism while the former can link both through this element and the expeditions undertaken by some service members. It is also worth considering the impact of some other larger organisations with global links, such as the East India Company and church missionaries.

Potential Places to Search

- There are two local studies websites which may also be useful – Exeter Memories and 'Telling Our Stories'. The former gives a list of significant Exeter people, while the

latter was the product of a local history project tracing immigrant populations to Exeter.

- Please take care when using either of them! Exeter Memories is an entirely amateur/volunteer organisation and as such the information on it is not always entirely accurate. Telling Our Stories produced some interesting material across the project but is also subject to some inaccuracies, the best example being on the interactive map. This links Guinea Street with the West African country, suggesting that the street was named after the country and the use of the word 'guinea' as a measure of currency (from 17th century). However, the name Guinea Street pre-dates the country name by about 300 years, with variants on 'Guinea' being recorded from the reign of Henry II in the 13th century. It is more likely that the name originated in a corruption of another word, most likely 'Ginnel', which meant a narrow passageway. Both sites are still useful for getting ideas and starting points, but should just be treated with caution. You should also be aware that the short biographies/accounts on the websites may be the full extent of the information available about a person or event.
- You could also have a look at the RAMM 'Collections' page and it's list of collectors, all of whom have a local connection via the RAMM.
- The Exeter Civic Society page also lists all of its blue plaques around the city. Looking at this may be useful just in terms of who and what has been commemorated and why.
- There are some books in our collection which list notable Devon people, which again may give you some ideas for starting points or potential – there is a list at the end of the document of useful books.
- Don't be afraid to just go and explore the stock. The books on Exeter will give you a feel for the history of the city and its notable events, buildings, trades and people. Have a rummage through the 19th century book stock – the travel, natural history and history sections can suggest subjects and areas to look at.
- The Family History section may also be useful for finding subjects and global links
- Our early members lists will also give potential subjects as many members were travellers, traders and explorers.

Sources

Once you have a subject or person in mind, teasing out the details will be the next step. We have a variety of sources in the DEI to help with your research, including books, maps, newspapers, periodicals, illustrations and pamphlets. You are welcome to use anything on the shelves, but please take care when using older items or anything tied up with book tape as some of our stock is a bit fragile.

Books

- The book stock is a mixture of general 19th century titles and titles with a South West emphasis. Until the 1970s, the Institution bought general books which they thought would be of interest to members. The 19th century stock has a very definite flavour of 'improving' literature, with an extensive collection of religious and theological titles (Sections 'A' and 'B'). There are also large collections of 19th century travel books, natural history and global history.
- The travel books mostly describe journeys of exploration, archaeology and missionary work. They give useful insights into attitudes towards travel and other cultures and can be useful for exploring both colonialism and globalisation. The early 20th century titles often cover the lives of British ex-pats living in colonial nations. These books can be found on the Outer Gallery in the 'G' section – please ask at the library desk if you would like to look at these as the gallery is generally locked.
- The history section has a 'broad themes' and 'great lives' emphasis, which was the fashion in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Again, this can help give insight into attitudes in former times. You can find these books in the Outer Library in section 'C'
- The natural history section covers a wide range of themes, from works on specific species (particularly marine species) to geology and gardening. Some of the volumes in this section can be considered companions to those in the 'G' section, with works which were inspired by voyages of discovery, often describing flora and fauna. These books are found on the Outer Gallery in section 'N'.
- From the 1970s, the Institution concentrated on buying books about the South West. All of these can be found in the Inner Library and they cover a huge range of subjects. Books about Exeter can be found on Bay 53 and cover both the general history of the city and more specific subjects.
- Useful books of other types include trade directories, which list the traders and residents of Exeter, clerical directories listing the clergymen of England and armed service lists. We also have some copies of the India list (listing British civil servants in colonial India) and the medical directories listing medical professionals. All of these types of book can be found in the Inner Library, with the trade directories and clerical directories on Bay 33 and the others on the upper shelves of Bays 32, 36, 39 and 42.

Newspapers

- The Institution has a good collection of original 19th and 20th century local newspapers. Many of these are in hard copy – making them rare survivors – and the Institution also houses a larger selection of local newspapers on microfilm. Some of the local titles can also be accessed in digital format via the London Library, which the Institution takes a subscription to. There is a list of available newspapers kept at the Librarian's Desk and you are also welcome to browse the bound hard copies kept in the inner library on Bays 36, 39 and 42.

- Newspapers can be a fantastic source for tracking events, attitudes and social change. The letters pages can be quite revealing with regard to social attitudes and views on current affairs, as people often used this as an outlet for ideas and opinions.
- Adverts, including small ads, can be another useful source. Small ads often include things such as situations vacant (job ads) giving an idea about the kind of roles people were doing. 19th century papers often include reports on Naval action and can include information about 'arrivals' – literally people arriving in a town or port – and voyages. It should be noted that the 'arrivals' sections is generally written about the wealthy, rather than ordinary people.
- You may also find reports regarding prominent trades, industries or companies. Local papers for the mid-to-late 20th century also often have features on local businesses, particularly pubs and restaurants, which might be useful for tracking social change and changes to the population of Exeter.

Periodicals and Journals

- The Institution has a broad range of 19th century journals and magazines, as well as a range of local periodicals.
- Our collection of 19th century periodicals includes the *Gentleman's Magazine* (from 1731 onwards), the *Edinburgh Review*, *Westminster Review*, *Quarterly Review*, *Cornhill Magazine*, the *United Service Journal*, *Punch* and the *London Illustrated News*. All of these contain articles on current affairs and the political matters of the day. The magazine-type titles, such as *Cornhill* and *Punch* can also give useful insights into social attitudes.
- The local periodicals are mostly 20th century and cover general titles, such as the *Dartmoor Magazine*, and smaller publications for specific organisations, such as the Exeter Archaeological Society. The DEI also stocks the major local journals, such as *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* and *Southern History*, as well as subject-specific titles such as *Maritime South West*. Periodicals of this type are extremely useful as they often have short pieces on individuals or trades that do not feature elsewhere. There is a list of periodicals kept at the Librarians Desk which will give titles of periodicals we have.

Tracts

- Tracts are early pamphlets written on specific subjects. They can be useful for gauging opinions on contemporary issues, and if you are researching a person or society who were campaigning for social change, you may find a tract written by them in this collection.
-

Directories

- The equivalent of the internet for former times! Directories are essentially indexes to trades and people, and you can glean quite a lot of information from them. We have local trade directories from the late 19th century which list inhabitants of Exeter and businesses. There are also directories for specific professions, such as the Navy and Army lists, Crockford's directory of the clergy and the Medical Directories. There are also a limited number of India lists, which list the civil servants of the colonial government.

Limitations and Pitfalls

- *Prominence and Time* – The more prominent a person was, the more records you will find. Finding information for those who were somehow prominent in public life, through wealth or status, is much easier than finding information about 'ordinary' people. The majority of people don't leave many traces of themselves for us to find, and the further back in time you go, the more difficult it is. Official records were not kept for many things prior to the 19th century, so if you are researching a person or subject from an earlier period, you may find very little to go on as not many records exist to tell us anything about them. The majority of people were illiterate prior to the 19th century, which means that many ordinary people left little trace of themselves.
- *Certain subjects* – Sometimes it's just not possible to track a particular subject because the sources would be very obscure. Example from last year was person wanting to research commodity racism – i.e. products which were 'racially biased' or sold with what we would now consider racist imagery or advertising. It was too difficult to track such products and who might have sold/made them in the time available. This would be really something best covered as a much bigger project – current PhD on 'Imperial socialisation in Victorian Board Games'.
- *Wills* – Unlikely you'll need this, but useful to know as wills are sometimes useful for work on those with links to plantations.
- *The wills for Devon* were lost in the Second World War when the Probate Office burnt down in the blitz. If you are looking for details from a will, ask the DEI librarians for help. There are some sources available Murray and Moger, Devon Wills project.
- *Newspapers* – Newspapers have changed in format and content a lot since their inception. Early newspapers for the 18th and early 19th centuries did not carry human interest stories, or even that much local news. Instead they were made up of reports of national and international events, with some local reports mixed in. As a result, if you are interested in someone who came from Exeter and then emigrated and became prominent in their new country, you may not find any trace at all of them in the local papers. You must also remember that news travelled much more slowly, so if you are searching for a report of an overseas event, it may not have

made the newspapers here until several weeks after the event. This is useful to know if you're researching something connected with travel or conflict. By the late 19th century papers have a much more familiar format, carrying more in the way of human interest stories and a lot of local news. News also reaches print much more quickly.

Useful Websites and Books

Exeter Civic Society - <https://www.exetercivicsociety.org.uk/>

Exeter Memories - <http://www.exetermemories.co.uk/>

Royal Albert Memorial Museum collectors pages -
<https://www.rammuseum.org.uk/collections/collectors/>

'Telling Our Stories, Finding Our Roots' - <http://www.tellingourstoriesexeter.org.uk/>

Ernest Gaskell, *Devonshire Leaders: Social and political* (Queenhithe, London, c.1900) – this is very much of its time, as all entries are male and gentry!

Todd Gray, *Remarkable Women of Devon* (Mint Press, Exeter, 2009)

Rosemary Lauder, *Devon Families* (Halsgrove, Tiverton, 2002)

John Van Der Kiste, *Devonshire's Own* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2007)

Who's Who in Devonshire (Wilson & Philips, Hereford, 1934)

Monica Wyatt, *People and Places in Devon* (Bossiny Books, Bodmin, 1985)

Finding the DEI catalogue

Go to the library home page, then click on 'Special Collections' at the bottom of the page

On the 'Special Collections' page, click on 'Search book stock' on the right-hand side

Go to the foot of the page and click on 'Classic Catalogue' under 'Library Links'

Select 'Advanced Search' on the right-hand side of the Classic Catalogue page. The 'Advanced Search' page has a 'Location' menu, click on 'Devon and Exeter Institution' to search just DEI stock.