COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

Colyton Parish History Society Newsletter

19 November 2025

Winter is coming and this month we have a potpourri of items for you: thanks to Claire Ross for her article on the *Merchant Adventurers of Exeter*. If you have done any history research recently and would like to share it with other members of the History Society please do contact me (sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk). Other items in this Newsletter include an update following Derek Gore's talk last month about the *Vikings in the South West* - on the enamelled Viking disc found at Colyton; information on the special embroidered *Red Dress* coming to Killerton for Christmas and finally news about an exciting new project we are launching in the New Year on how to research the history of your house…..

1. News

a. The Merchant Adventurers of Exeter - by Claire Ross, October 2025

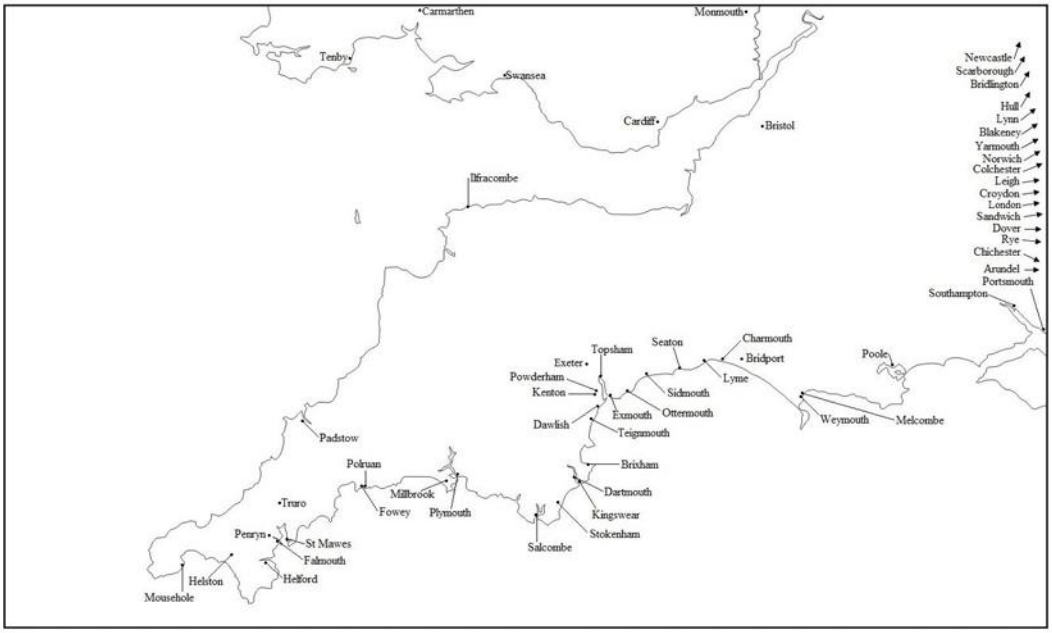
This banner has been flying outside our Heritage Centre all summer. It is the coat of arms for the Merchant Adventurers of Exeter, and it relates to Colyton as the Yonge

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE
a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

family of the Great House were members of it. But what did the Merchant Adventurers of Exeter actually do, and how did they operate?

When Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the throne, the monarchy was in severe financial difficulties. They were in substantial debt to German bankers after years of costly wars and, one of their main sources of revenue, had nose-dived! That source of revenue was international trade. At the beginning of the 1500s England was, in terms of international trade, a small backwater of Europe. The main export was raw wool, which English merchants tended to sell through the "staple" (ie wool market) at Calais. After raw wool sales collapsed in 1520s, woollen cloth became the main export. But then Martin Luther's Protestant teachings created uproar across Europe and international trade was disrupted – traders could no longer guarantee the safety of either their representatives or goods. But worse was to come. In 1556 Queen Mary lost Calais to the French. So the English wool staple moved to Antwerp, a major European market town. *(As it happened this didn't prove safe either as the Spanish Netherlands revolted against their Catholic overlords, with Antwerp itself being sacked by the Spanish in 1576.)* Basically Queen Elizabeth I desperately needed to encourage English merchants to engage more in international trade!

Exeter's Coastal Trade 1470-1570 - Identified Trading Links



(SOURCES: TNA E122, E190; DHC, ECA, TC)

Map from Williams' Thesis vol 1, page 105

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE
a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

Exeter was a major "outport" at the time, involved in international trade and re-distribution through a coastal network. Queen Elizabeth I granted the merchants of Exeter a charter founding the Merchant Adventurers of Exeter (MAE) in 1560. This charter gave members of the "guild" a monopoly over trading with France and "dominions of French King" (ie the colonies in the New World). This monopoly enraged the dominant Exeter guild, the Tailors, as the Merchant Adventurers excluded all Exeter citizens from wholesale and retail in any imported goods and from the export trade.

How did the MAE operate?

The idea seems to have been that guild members would work together rather than in competition with each other, keeping prices and quality high. Unfortunately the minutes of early proceedings show that brawling and insults between members was such a problem that a new regulation had to be created in 1572.

Providing traders were freemen or freewomen of the city, they could apply to join the MAE by paying a "reasonable sum". Having a distributive guild, also meant that Merchant Adventuring became a more professional business. For example, apprentices of MAE members were often sent abroad to learn languages and were given handbooks on good manners, accountancy and legal documents in foreign countries! They were expected to serve 8 year indentures and not finish until the age of 24.

How well did the MAE do?

Initially the problem was the French Wars of Religion which made trade with the usual places eg Morlaix, St Malo and Vitrie sporadic; longer voyages to Bordeaux and Nantes were tried. And then the plague hit Exeter hard in 1569. In October 1569 MAE was in so much financial difficulty that all members had to pay 16d to clear the debt! But eventually a trade agreement between England and France was signed in 1572 and things started to improve for the Exeter merchants. Indeed Exeter merchants even started diversifying into ship ownership.

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

Map from Williams' Thesis vol 1, page 100

Who was in and who was out?

Not surprisingly William Hurst was the inaugural governor of the MAE. Even before 1560 he was one of the biggest merchants in Exeter. In 1520/21 he was the 2nd largest exporter (£270) and 4th largest importer (£138). In 1537/38 he imported £599 goods across 18 shipments. However, John Periam, another long-established and significant Exeter merchant, did not become a member even after he was fined 20 marks for illegally trading with France. His son John Periam joined in 1572, somewhat reluctantly, going on to become a Governor of the MAE and mayor of Exeter. (John the Elder's granddaughter Mary married Sir William Pole of Shute & Colcombe.)

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE
a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

Richard and John Strobrigge had been principal Exeter importers in the early 1550s. They were originally from Hooperhayne, Colyton but they both moved to Exeter becoming freemen of the city in 1547 and 1549 respectively. In 1557 they inherited their houses in Exeter from their father. Richard was fined for trading to France in March 1561, but he still does not appear to join the MAE! His brother John becomes virtually bankrupt in 1552, possibly his inheritance cleared his debts, but he had died by 1566 also never having joined the MAE.

John Yonge, then a merchant from Axminster, was only admitted to the MAE on 4 May 1581 at a cost of £2 "considering his poor estate". As he bought an estate in Colyton in the 1590s, building the very fine Great House, we have to assume that he became a successful Merchant Adventurer of Exeter. Certainly he is known to have supported Gilbert and Davis' second attempt to find the North West passage to Cathay in 1586 to the sum of £25. He was also a member of the short-lived Senegal Adventurers founded in 1588, but not seemingly of the Spanish Company founded in 1577.

What happened next?

In the late 16th century, Merchant Adventurers of Exeter and men of Devon start to get involved in looking for the fabled North West passage to Cathay. Over time this endeavour morphs into setting up a "staple" and colonies around Newfoundland. Sadly by the early 17th century, Merchant Adventuring is inexorably moving towards the colonisation of the New World, and the slave trade.

References

"*Mid-Tudor Manor: Life in the 1550s*" website https://midtudormanor.wordpress.com/

"*London's Triumph: Merchant Adventurers and the Tudor City*" Stephen Alford

"*An Elizabethan Guild of the city of Exeter, an account of the proceeding of the Society of Merchant Adventurers during the latter half of the 16th century*" W Cotton An Elizabethan Guild of the city of Exeter, an account of the proceeding of the Society of Merchant Adventurers, during the latter half of the 16th century : Cotton, William : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive

"*The Trading Community of Exeter 1470-1570 with Special Reference to Merchants and Tailors*" P Williams

"*The Strawbridges of Stockland and beyond*" Bryan Drew

Wikipedia

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

b. Colyton History Society – November talk

Don't forget this month's talk on *Local Landowners* by Claire Ross at 2.30 pm on Tuesday, 25 November at the Town Hall. All welcome!

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

c) ***Vikings in the South West* update**

At last month's talk on *Vikings in the South West* Derek Gore, Honorary Fellow, University of Exeter showed a Viking era enamelled disc which had been found in Colyton. After the meeting Derek kindly sent me the image from the PAS scheme - reproduced here below. He also provided some additional information:

PLAQUE - **Unique ID:** DEV-7AE0B6

- Object type certainty: Certain Workflow status: Published

Circular copper-alloy disc inlaid with opaque champlevé enamel holding panels of fine millefiori glass, a component of a larger item; it dates somewhere in the period from 670 to 900 AD (and possibly beyond) but may well be 9th century.
Cells to take enamel have been cast into the copper alloy (the champlevé technique), with raised walls between in the shape of a central cross with hollow T-shaped or stepped ends to the arms. Each T-shaped arm terminal originally had a square piece of millefiori glass set centrally; two of these remain, with square scars where the others are missing. In each of the spaces between the arms was another identical millefiori square, set at an angle; three of these survive. The squares have a

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE
a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

dark ground with a white cross running from edge to edge across a white outlined square; at the intersections of the white lines are tiny red dots. Around the millefiori squares is a decayed dark brown material. The reverse has no decoration and appears flat; there is no visible sign of solder.

There are a number of little enamelled discs of this general type with angular cell work found in England, for example at Coddenham and Barham, both in Suffolk, which have enamel but no millefiori glass; also see a disc with millefiori glass from Great Barton, Suffolk (West 1998, fig. 8.5).. There are also remarkable Irish glass discs inlaid with glass lines from Camerton in Somerset, and in the linked pin suite from Roundway Down in Wiltshire; both of these were buried in the later 7th century. Both enamels and clear-glass discs imitate cloisonné patterns used by earlier Germanic goldsmiths, either by contrasting inlay into the glass surface or, as here, by angular champlevé fields of enamel.

The best parallels, however, are decorative plates fitted into elaborate pieces of 8th-10th century Irish metalwork. Examples include a horn terminal now in the Ashmolean Museum (AN1927.123), and on the drop of the Prosperous crozier, now in the National Museum of Ireland. Unlike the domed Ashmolean example, however, it appears always to have been flat.

The small size is quite consistent in the whole group and suggest some standardised components. These little discs were probably attached by soldering, and one example in the National Museum of Ireland has a circular collar on the back and must have been tapped into a prepared socket. Enamel and millefiori discs have a long history in Ireland and the fine quality of the millefiori may bring this piece as late as the ninth century, a possible revival following the widespread use of bold but much simpler blue-and-white chequerboard pattern filling walled areas, as on Irish mounts on the Oseberg bucket and from Llangorse, Brecon.

This piece may therefore be Viking-period spolia from Ireland, the scatter of such traded items explaining its presence in Devon; the south-west has produced a lead weight with a lozenge-shaped Irish enamel stud, from Ilchester, Somerset. Such discs were in use for a long time, including on the great Cross of Cong of 1123.

References

Welcome to the Portable Antiquities Scheme Website

Search results from the database Page: 1

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

2. History Society News

a. Who's lived in your house?

Ever wondered who lived in your house before you? Well next year Colyton History Society is launching an exciting new project to find out more about the history of properties here in Colyton, who lived in them and what they did. We hope to build up a profile of who lived in each house over time, similar to the process used in the tv documentary series *A House Through Time* presented by David Olusuga. We are keen to see how society evolved here in Colyton.

If you are interested in joining the project or are keen to research the history of your own home please do come and join us. It doesn't have to be an old house or a big house because every house has a story to tell. When was it built? Is it detached or terraced? What is it made of stone or brick? Is the roof thatched or tiled? Has it been enlarged and extended? Is it a farm? Do you have a well in the garden? Do you have a garden?

Was your house always a home for families to live in or has it previously been used as a commercial premises - a bakery perhaps or a forge or a long building where nets were repaired or a pub? Do you know if anything exciting or eventful ever happened in your house? Is it haunted? Did anyone famous ever live there?

We will be holding a meeting in the New Year (date tbc) to explore how to answer some of those questions. Do please come along. For those new to research, guidance will be provided on how to go about finding information on the history of your home and where to look. A surprising amount can be done on line these days. If you have already begun researching the history of your house here in Colyton Parish and are willing to share what you have discovered including photographs please do bring your findings along. In the Heritage Centre we already have information in the archives about some properties in Colyton but will always welcome more.

In the meantime if you have any questions do please talk to Sarah Humphries, (cloamcrazy@gmail.com), Claire Ross (clairehross61@gmail.com) or me – Sarah Charman (sarah.charman@yahoo.co.uk) We look forward to talking with you.

Reference

BBC Two - A House Through Time

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

3. Other organisations events

Killerton NT Christmas display

This week I attended a briefing for volunteers at Killerton, given by Kirstie Macleod the creator of the Red Dress Embroidery project, about the very special red dress which will be on display at Killerton over Christmas.

Made of blood red silk dupion it has been worked on by embroiderers from all over the world. Many of them vulnerable women and girls who have suffered from war, violence and abuse. One tale Kirstie told us was of a woman from Kosovo who when she was just twelve years old was a victim of a massacre. Her twelve year old body was riddled with 12 bullets. Somehow she survived and thanks to an alert photo journalist. she was flown to a hospital and safety. Now a grown woman she has contributed one of the pieces of embroidery on the Dress.

Killerton is open for Christmas from 29 November 2025 to 4 January 2026.

References

The Red Dress

Christmas at Killerton | Devon | National Trust

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org

4. Items you may have missed

a. Devon historians uncover hidden history of women's work in Tudor England
Devon historians uncover hidden history of women's work in Tudor England | Devon Live

b. Tudor Domesday revived
Henry VIII's forgotten 'Tudor Domesday' revived | Devon Live

c. Hero pilots who defended Exeter in the darkness of war –

The hero pilots who defended Exeter in the dark skies of war | Devon Live

d. Hidden Devon diaries reveal love, fear and blunt options

Hidden Devon diaries reveal love, fear and blunt opinions

e. Mystery Devon gold ring found in a field 400 miles away

Mystery Devon gold ring found in a field 400 miles away | Devon Live

f. Detectorist finds huge haul of Roman coins

Detectorist finds huge haul of silver coins from 141 BC 'dropped by Roman soldier' | Devon Live

g. Colyton rebel town

https://www.midweekherald.co.uk/news/25549355.colyton---rebellious-town-devon/?ref=ebbn&nid=2302&u=26e309a1465491fa9108b8530c3bc91f&date=191025

h. Seaton's royal nurse Ida Thomas

Seaton's royal nurse Ida Thomas | Midweek Herald

i. Bronze Age burial mounds at Golden Cap, Dorset

The Bronze Age burial mounds at Golden Cap in Dorset | Great British Life

j. Roman coins found in farmers field

Hoard of Roman coins found in farmer's field could sell for thousands

k. Rare crystals found in English Stone Age ceremonial site

heritage lottery fund

COLYTON
HERITAGE CENTRE

a. Merchant's House
Market Place
Colyton
Devon
EX24 6JR
e. info@colytonheritagecentre.org
w. www.colytonheritagecentre.org