

Exeter Woollen Trail



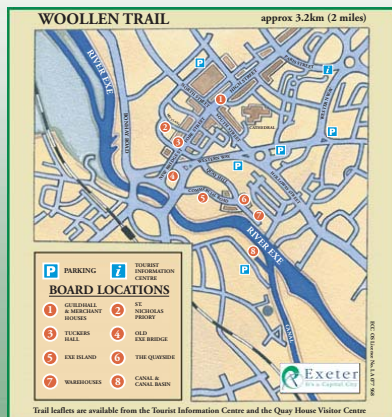
Exeter City Council



A Vital Link

All routes from the west of the city led to this bridge. When the cloth trade was at its peak the bridge would have been crowded with teams of packhorses from the farms and villages surrounding Exeter, laden with bundles of cloth for sale or finishing in the city.

By the 18th century Exeter was the third most important trade centre in the country and Devon's serge industry had become the most important branch of England's export trade in woollens. Holland, Germany and Spain were its biggest customers.



A Bridge too cramped!

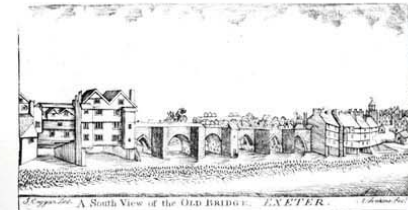
The old bridge across the Exe had seventeen arches, a church at each end and houses all along it overhanging the river. Remains of the bridge can be seen opposite. It was built about 1200, largely due to the efforts of Nicholas Gervaise, a prominent city merchant who owned mills on Exe Island.

The bridge was narrow and as trade and traffic increased, congestion

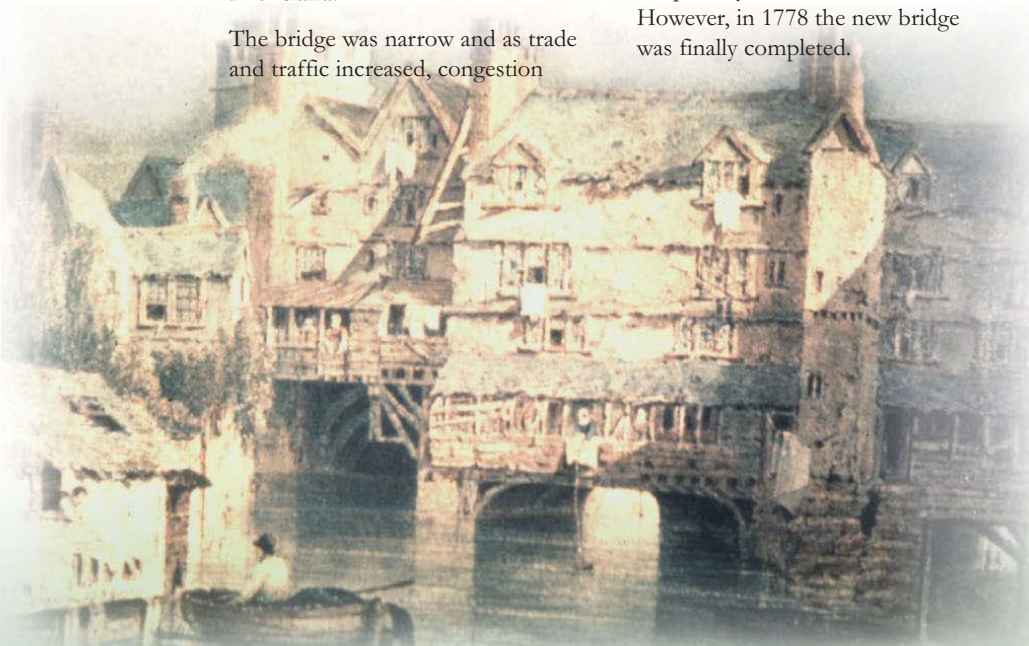
became so bad that the approaches also became blocked. In 1770 plans were made for a 'fine new bridge' with a great ramped causeway leading up to the foot of Fore Street - where you are now standing.

The scheme did not run smoothly. The architect was totally incompetent; money ran out and the bridge was swept away before it could be finished! However, in 1778 the new bridge was finally completed.

A further bridge was built in 1905, followed by the present pair which were opened in 1969 and 1972. As a major entry point into the City, the bridges have always been busy.




The old Exe Bridge as it appeared in the 18th century by J. Coggan (Exeter City Museums)



An early 19th century painting showing houses on the old bridge by Emanuel Jeffery (Exeter City Museums)



Exe Bridges today.



“There’s such chaos on the bridge today! People are coming to Exeter from all parts of the country. The city’s really got a name for itself now as a great market and finishing centre for the woollen cloth industry. Looks likely we’ll all be stuck here for a while – they’ll need a new bridge one day if it gets any busier!”

River water was used for dyeing and finishing the cloth. Which of the following were used to dye the wool different colours: plants, vegetables, insects, lichens, bark?



Answer: All of them