



Devon Family History Society
Joint Project Publication with
Devon Record Office



REGISTERS OF PEDLARS INDORSEMENTS

1875-1881

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A pedlar is a man or woman who travels and trades on foot, going from town to town or house to house selling goods or offering skills in handicrafts and selling such things as household goods. A pedlar had no fixed spot, but had to keep on the move, which limited him or her to selling only those goods he or she could carry. Pedlars were therefore offering a rather different service from that offered by street traders. That was reflected in the "lighter touch" regulation that they enjoyed. Under the Pedlars Act of 1870, pedlars had to hold a certificate which was valid for one year and was also valid outside the city or town where they lived.

If a pedlar remained on one spot for any length of time, so effectively inviting customers to come to him or her, he or she would be street trading without the necessary authority. Such an action could lead to prosecution and confiscation of goods. There was no national legislation that covered the actual act of street trading, but local by-laws often prohibited this, or made it necessary to obtain a permit from the local authority before trading in the street. Street trading included selling newspapers, flowers and singing or performing for money.

The Exeter City Archives collection contains two Registers of Pedlars' Indorsements, covering the dates 1871-1875 and 1875-1881. These record the dates of indorsements made by the Chief Constable of Exeter Police Force on the certificates of pedlars in the City who had travelled from other parts of England and Wales. The information given in the registers is the name of the pedlar, his or her address (often just a place-name) the police district which issued the certificate and the dates of the certificate's issue and expiry. Most of the pedlars came from southern England and south Wales but there are a few from Lancashire and Yorkshire. Some made repeated visits to Exeter and it seems likely that they had a set route which they travelled each year, selling their wares. The Registers show the distances people in the 1870s were prepared to travel to earn a living; they could be useful in helping to track down itinerant members of the family who were away from home on census night.

The City Archives also contain a Register of Pedlars' Certificates which records certificates issued annually to pedlars between 1871 and 1874, by the Chief Constable under the Pedlars Act of 1870. The register lists the name and residential address of each pedlar and the date on which the certificate was granted and expired. Almost all of the pedlars listed were residents of the city of Exeter.

[- Return to Publications -](#)