



Devon Family History Society
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EXETER MAGISTRATES COURT REGISTER

1889

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Magistrates' Courts were previously known as the Courts of Petty Sessions. They were the lowest tier in the English court system. They developed as extra meetings to lessen the burden on Justices of the Peace [magistrates] in Quarter Sessions, which were only held four times a year.

As was the normal practice Devon was subdivided into geographical divisions with each magistrate being assigned to a particular division. These magistrates' court divisions have altered over time.

Most minor crimes were dealt with by these courts, which sometimes met twice a month, between the Quarter Sessions. They required the presence of two Justices of the Peace [magistrates] but no jury.

They dealt mainly with minor cases such as petty theft, drunkenness, minor assaults, bastardy and failure to maintain families, larceny, trespassing, parking and traffic offences, fraud and juvenile cases, as well as ale licensing and adoption.

Records of the Courts of Petty Sessions/Magistrates' Courts therefore typically relate to criminal cases heard by the magistrates or Justices of the Peace for each division. They may also include registers of licences for public houses, clubs and other bodies.

The records of Exeter Magistrates' Court form part of the Exeter City Archives collection held at Devon Record Office. The records include Exeter Magistrates' Court registers, which are also known as "registers of the Court of Summary Jurisdiction" dating from 1 January 1880. There are also surname indexes to these registers from this date, as well as earlier magistrates' minute books of court proceedings dating from 1836; registers of licences from 1874; Justices' minutes under the Licensing Act, 1902-1932; some Juvenile Court registers from 1933 and other Justices' special meeting minute books and books of entry for overseers, constables, licensed victuallers and dealers in game, 1858-1914.

This booklet covers Exeter Magistrates' Court register entries for each year, which are found in the register covering May 1885 to February 1889. The magistrates' minute books of court proceedings for those dates held at Devon Record Office may give additional detail on specific cases listed in the court register.