

# THE GREAT EXETER FISH WAR

*(text to go 'The Great Exeter Fish War of 1309:  
Story-telling and Simulation Exemplar  
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## **John Hooker's story, rewritten in modern English**

The 3rd year of King Edward the 2nd, 1309

Roger Beynym mayor

This year there was a great controversy which caused great troubles between Hugh Courtenay, 3rd Earl of Devon, and the mayor and common people of Exeter. What happened was this.

One market day the Earl sent his servant to the city to buy fish. That day there were only three baskets of fish in the market. The Bishop of Exeter's servant also came to buy fish. Both servants wanted the whole supply of fish and they argued about who was to have it. The mayor, for his part, said that the common people should also be served and have the benefit of the market. So he decided the argument by delivering one basket to the Earl's servant, one to the Bishop's servant, and reserving the third basket for the people at the market. When the Earl heard this, he considered himself insulted by the mayor, in that he had not been given all the fish, and threatened that he would be revenged.

Not long after this Earl Hugh came to the city, staying in his lodgings in the Black friars' house. He immediately sent for the mayor to come to speak with him. The mayor, who was a retainer of the Earl's, hearing of the Earl's displeasure and knowing his temper, feared the worst. So he called all his friends and the common people to the Guildhall. He told them how the Earl was offended with him and why, that the Earl had sent for him, and that he was afraid to go unless they would accompany him and help him if need be. This they promised to do.

Then the mayor said: 'Masters, I know the Earl will fall out with me, and as he has threatened will take his revenge on me. As he is angry with me because I did my job by favouring the city people, I pray you to accompany me and stand by me. And when I am with the Earl, if you see that I am kept there for a long time, then break open the doors by force and search me out. Otherwise I shall be in great peril and danger'.

After this, and several similar speeches, they all went together to the house of the Black friars. When they arrived the mayor was received into the Earl's lodgings, but the door was locked behind him. As soon as the mayor entered, the Earl began to rage stormily, and would not be pacified. The mayor, seeing that none of his excuses or answers would be listened to, suddenly took off his coat, which bore the Earl's coat of arms. He handed it to the Earl [indicating that he would no longer be the Earl's man].

At this the Earl was so furious that he became choleric, and the mayor feared what would become of him. The common people were outside, wondering what had become of him, because he was so long with the Earl. They knocked at the door and demanded the mayor. After a long time and many demands their wish was still not granted, so they got ladders and other stuff to rip open the house and break open the doors. The Earl, taking his friends' advice and fearing what might happen if the commoners didn't get their way, then begged the mayor to pacify them. The mayor did this, and the commoners went quietly.

The Earl had to put a good face on it at the time to avoid the people's fury, but he hated the city of Exeter and its citizens ever after.

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