

### Memories of 1914 - Restaged for one day only

The restaging of The Great War exhibition on Saturday 1st November was very successful; St Michaels Academy have even requested that a member of the society come and speak to the children about Heavitree's past. Well done, everyone! SK Photos by Martin Weiler:



### Annual General Meeting - 10th September 2014

Present: 24 members Apologies: Hazel Bound and Ann Mitchell

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Viv thanked everyone for their help with the two exhibitions, which were well attended. Both were visited by the local mayor, and all information is now with the Devon Records Office. She thanked everyone on the committee for their work over the past year and said that the membership numbers have increased.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT:** Terry had nothing to add

**TREASURER'S REPORT:** Jonathan had circulated the current account and balance sheets which showed a healthy financial statement. He outlined the donations from various sources and the increase in membership following the successful displays held this year. There was, however, no need for complacency and members should continue to attract potential interested people. The accounts were duly accepted by the meeting.

### ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

**CHAIR:** Vivienne Smith - proposed by Hilda Mitchelmore, seconded by Michael Smith;

**SECRETARY:** Terry Bound - proposed by Vivienne Rowe, seconded by Frank Potter;

**TREASURER:** Jonathan Wright - proposed by Margaret Wannell, seconded by Hilda Mitchelmore;

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** Sally Kernick - proposed by Michael Smith, seconded by Terry Bound;

**TALKS ORGANISER:** Hilda Mitchelmore - proposed by Martin Weiler, seconded by Julia Spruntulis

All nominees were duly elected to serve for the coming year.

### OTHER BUSINESS DISCUSSED:

- Suggestions for spending money in the bank: adverts for talks, restaging of Great War exhibition;

- Ideas for social events, perhaps an annual guided walk of Heavitree High Street (followed by a drink in the pub), a tour of Higher Cemetery, and a visit to Devon Heritage Centre;

- The need to publish regularly, the availability of current publications - what do we have, who can access it and how? Could out of print leaflets be put onto the website?

- How do we publicise talks? Poster by Co-op, notice board in the Pleasure Ground, doctor's surgery, Robinsons News, Central Library.

## Members' Talks

Following the formal AGM, three members of the society gave talks of around ten minutes each. I can personally say that I enjoyed this time very much; especially the fact that the stories were so personal. Many other members told me how much they had appreciated this part of the evening and that they thought this was a very valuable way to spend part of a meeting. Thank you to Frank, Hilda and Lyndon, for sharing their personal stories and memories with us.

### *Frank Potter - Harry Hems*



Frank has an interest in Harry Hems, an architectural and ecclesiastical sculptor, because his father was apprenticed to his company between 1922-38. Frank described how in 1866, Hems, who was not from the area, found a horseshoe on the side of the road and decided that it was a sign that he should settle in Exeter. He started a company here that specialised in ecclesiastical sculpture and church fittings, and named it

"The Ecclesiastical Art Works". The business prospered, and at its height employed over one hundred people. Hems' workshop can still be seen at 84 Longbrook Street and his legacy in sculptures across Devon, from the Royal Albert Memorial Museum to the memorial cross for the theatre fire in Higher Cemetery. He also salvaged medieval woodcarvings from many churches across the South West, which can now be seen in the museum. Frank showed us a book which had belonged to Hems and was acquired by his father in 1938 when the firm closed. The book, 'Art Foliage', was a source of inspiration for Hems and included cuttings and letters that were tucked into it. Frank read out a letter in which Hems had written "This is the first art book I ever bought".

### *Hilda Michelmores - Memories of a shop in the High Street*

In 1937, Hilda was fourteen years old, and went to work in the Devon and Somerset Stores, which used to stand from where Co-op is now right to the back of Boots, but which was destroyed in the Blitz. The shop was very classy, selling all kinds of goods such as wine and spirits, fish, meats, flowers, a drug dept. etc, and its customers were professionals, ladies and bishops. Hilda remembers the ladies coming in for their



shopping, followed by their chauffeurs who would carry their baskets. Some were never seen, but made orders over the phone (rather advanced for 1937). Hilda worked as a typist and book-keeper, earning 9s (45p) a week. Employees wore black wraparound aprons (which they had to provide themselves), no jewellery and a ribbon in their hair. The customer was 'always right' and if you did something wrong you were given no notice. If you worked there for a year you were entitled to one day's paid holiday, for two years, two days, etc. The hours of work were 8.30-6.30 with



an hour for dinner, 8.30-8.00 on Saturdays, and all the shops on Exeter closed at lunchtime on Wednesdays. There was no overtime, but there was sometimes a lottery for goods from the shop. Then the war came, along with rationing. Hilda remembers fire watching on the flat roof of the building on the night Paris Street and Sidwell Street were bombed. Then on 4th May came the worst bombing. At 2am everything caught alight. The fire engines came, but their hoses did not fit Exeter High Street nozzles, and the shop was destroyed.



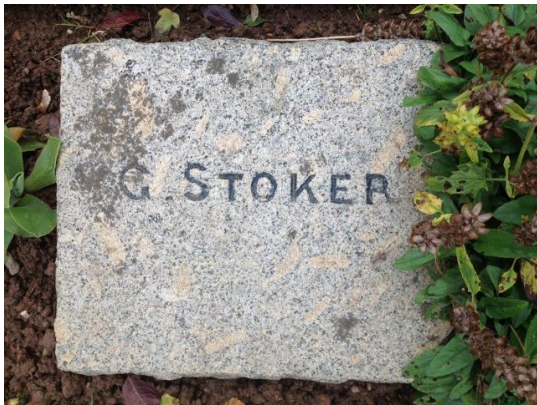
### *Lyndon Taylor - Mincinglake Stream/Heavitree Bridge*

Lyndon began by saying that he remembers going into the Devon and Somerset Stores! He also once painted the outside of Harry Hems' house, and went to school with the free-mason who came to talk to us in a previous meeting! Lyndon then talked about Heavitree Bridge, which was built in 1929 to create Beacon Avenue, to where he moved in 1935. He described how the stream beneath - Mincinglake - meanders underneath various streets of Heavitree, reappearing here and there, joining with other small streams, opening up in the Ludwell Valley, to Topsham Road, the grounds of the crematorium and eventually joining the river. Lyndon's memories were of playing in the stream as a boy, building dens and dams and exploring the tunnels. As boys they once came across the remains of St Katherine's Priory, mentioned in 1100. The nuns had once built a 40ft dam that contained fifteen million gallons of water. The stream is hidden now, but the boys had great fun playing there.



## Dracula Link With Heavitree

One of the world's most popular literary and cinematic characters has a remarkable link with Heavitree. Bram Stoker, the Irish writer, penned *Dracula*, a gothic horror novel, in 1897. It received mixed reviews at first and the initial print run was only 3,000, but the



book, which tells the tale of the Vampire Count Dracula from Transylvania, went on to blaze the trail for our modern obsession with vampires. Millions of copies have now been sold and it has been translated into over 40 languages. It has also been the subject of several major film and play adaptations. Indeed the character Count Dracula appears in over 200 movies; second only to Sherlock Holmes.

But what is the link to Heavitree? This involves George, Bram's youngest brother. George became a surgeon and worked for the Red Cross and Red Crescent. He was heavily involved in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-88 and spent a lot of this in Romania and Bulgaria. After the war George went to live with Bram who helped him write his memoirs of the conflict. Bram was inspired by his brother's accounts of the nationalities and cultures of the area and these sowed the seeds for a novel. That novel was *Dracula*.

George had an outstanding medical career. He helped save thousands of wounded soldiers in the Russo-Turkish war. Later he went out to South Africa and built up medical support for fighters in the Zulu War. Noting how the Zulus treated their wounded, George pioneered the use of oxygen as a surgical treatment, still in use to this day.

During the First World War George continued to serve with distinction providing oxygen treatment to wounded soldiers. In February 1920 he fell ill while in Bath and was moved to Streatham Hall, one of the military hospitals in Exeter. He died on 23 March 1920 aged 64.

Exeter City Council had decided that they would be responsible for the burial of all servicemen who died in the City from 1914 to 1921. Their final resting place was Higher Cemetery, Heavitree. And so the man who inspired *Dracula* is buried and commemorated in our local cemetery. But of course he was a hero in his own right and this was recognised with the award of the Order of Chivalry and the Order of St Michael and Saint George.



The story of George Stoker is one of many accounts published by the Friends of Higher Cemetery in their superb publication 'The First World War Graves of Higher Cemetery Exeter' brilliantly researched by Michael Parrott. Earlier this year the Friends paid tribute to those buried, including George Stoker, at a special ceremony attended by representatives of the Devonshire Regiment.

Martin Weiler

### From the Archives: 'Is Heavitree High St. a Roman Road?' (Newsletter 5: 2001)

There has been much speculation and debate in the society over the possibility of Fore Street having a Roman origin but we may never be able to prove it. In reality, even if it began its life as a solidly-built Roman military road, nineteen centuries of continuous use, and its slope, would have removed all physical evidence. However, we can still investigate the possibility by association with the proven routes and the intelligent interpretation of the topography in the gaps. To this end the Society was pleased to welcome John Allan, Curator of Antiquities of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, who has extensive knowledge of Exeter's history and archaeology of all periods, to address us on the subject of Roman roads. Indeed, such is John's reputation as an authority on Devon's past that the audience on the evening of 20 March was swollen by many non members eager to hear what he had to say. The following account of John Allan's talk is compiled from extensive notes taken by Hazel Harvey to whom I am much indebted.

#### The Military Way

Most importantly, Roman roads were constructed by the army, for the army. When the Second Augustan Legion built their fortress at Exeter in the 50s A.D., roads leading to it from the rest of Roman Britain, and in particular the contemporary Legionary fortress at Lincoln at the other end of the Foss Way, will have been laid out in predictable ways, with forts placed at intervals equivalent to a day's march. The *Antonine Itinerary* of the third century A.D. listed the mileage between important places such as posting stations and major towns. Included on the south coast route between Dorchester and Exeter, for example, is *Moridunum*, which may mean defensible place by the sea, and, although no hard evidence for a fort has yet been found, it is likely to have been close to present day Seaton. To the west of Exeter there is *Nemetostatio* and may be the fort known as North Tawton. Further west we have *Tamaris*, yet to be found, but must be a fort guarding the crossing of the river Tamar. It took until 1998 to find the Roman fort near Honiton on the Foss way; everyone knew it was there somewhere.

#### The Physical Evidence

With the aid of a so-called Urban Database, being compiled by John Bedford, which precisely locates and superimposes all known erotological evidence onto modern topographical maps, it is now much easier to see what was going on at any given period. The gates and many of the roads leading from the original Legionary fortress are known from excavations. An aerial photograph showing the very straight line of Topsham Road would have continued through the South Gate into the fort and out of the North Gate. Interestingly, the suspected route from the North gate was never found during excavations in the area of the Iron Bridge. Instead, Peter Weddell and the late Chris Henderson found evidence for the road turning north and running up what is now Paul Street. An East Gate, near St Stephen's Church in the High Street, would have run

in a straight line to join what is now Sidwell Street. The apparent wobble in the line of this road, from the later City Gate to Sidwell Street is thought by John Allan to be the result of recutting City defences during the Civil War. The road from the West Gate would have run to the Exe Bridge and beyond.

So far none of this helps the cause of Heavitree Fore Street except that during recent excavations in Princesshay, Roman road metalling was unexpectedly found running diagonally, due East from the Fort. This is still not quite in line with Heavitree Fore Street but does allow us to break the predictable 'dead-straight- grid mould.

Of the two Roman roads running to Exeter from the East, the Honiton-Exeter route as seen by John as an extension of the Foss Way, and the south coast road from Dorchester, John Allan agrees with Ivan Margary, still the best authority on the subject, that the best alignment for Fore Street comes from the latter. The south coast route arrives at Clyst St Mary and the bridging of the Clyst, then follows a straight line section of the Topsham parish boundary (always a good indicator of pre-Norman land division) to Sandy Gate, then on to Quarry Lane and East Wonford Hill. The building of the railway, bypass and motorway now make this route less obvious.

John Allan opened his talk into a discussion of the Foss Way from Honiton which is known with certainty as far as Rockbeare Straight. Margary describes a bendy route from Clyst Honiton closely following the low ground of the old A30 to join the South Coast road at Wonford Bridge at the bottom of East Wonford Hill (Margary 108). So Heavitree Fore Street scores twice! But, if one takes a look at a modern map we see another potential route into Exeter over a ridge via Blackhorse Lane to Gipsy Hill and then Hollow Lane. From this point the line can be imagined running to join the Pinhoe Road close to Polsloe Bridge, then to Blackboy Road, Sidwell Street and the East gate. Unfortunately no Roman road was discovered during the building of the M5 motorway. There seems to be little doubt that Heavitree Fore Street had its origins as a Roman road and could have led to both the East Gate and the South Gate forking at Livery Dole via Magdalen Road and Heavitree Road, Paris Street.

References: Margary, I.D. *Roman Roads in Britain vol.1, 1955*, London

References: Finn, RW, 1973 *Domesday Book; a Guide*, London

Orme, NI, 1991 *The Medieval Chapels of Heavitree, Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society No 49, 121-129*

## Website Archive

Please don't forget to check the ever growing archive of past newsletters at [www.heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/archive.html](http://www.heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/archive.html) - there is so much interesting information and research in these past newsletters, including information on Heavitree Jamaica, gravestones of note and articles about Heavitree from local old press.

## Upcoming History Society Events

**Wednesday 10th December - Rifford Room, 7:30pm - Martin Horrell 'Medieval Rood Screens' (followed by hot drinks and mince pies)**

**Wednesday 11th March 2015 - Rifford Room, 7:30pm**

**Wednesday 17th June 2015 - Rifford Room, 7:30pm**

**Wednesday 9th September 2015 - Rifford Room, 7:30pm - AGM**

## Non History Society Events

**6 December 2014, 2pm** - Exeter Civic Society - 'Visit to dissenters' graveyard'

**11th December 2014, 7pm** - Exeter History Society - 'The various types of stone used in the building of Exeter Cathedral', Rougemont Room, Central Library, Exeter

**16th January 2015** - Exeter History Society - Behind the scenes visit to the Cygnet Theatre

**31st January 2015, 2.30pm** - Exeter Civic Society - Visit to Salvation Army Temple, Friars' Walk

**12 February 2015, 7pm** - Exeter History Society - 'Wynards Almshouses', Rougemont Room, Central Library, Exeter

**28th February 2015, 2pm** - Exeter Civic Society - Visit to Exeter's Higher Cemetery

**21st March 2015, 1.30pm** - Friends of Higher Cemetery - 'The Boys' - Story of two RAF pilots buried in Higher Cemetery

*If you know of any events that you think members might appreciate, please contact me and I will include them in this section*

**CHRISTMAS QUIZ! Can you tell me where each of these is in Heavitree? Answers in the next newsletter.**



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