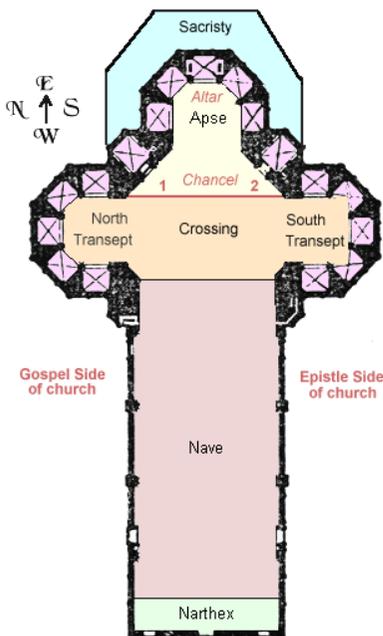


**Martin Horrell - Medieval Rood Screens**



At the last meeting, Martin Horrell gave a very interesting talk about rood screens. Heavitree Church, like virtually all others, is built with a two cell structure consisting of a nave and a chancel. The roof structure of the nave is probably named after the Latin *navis*, meaning boat, and would have been the responsibility of the congregation.

The chancel, on the other hand, would have been the responsibility of the clergy. From the earliest of times, there has been an architectural division between these two areas. The catholic belief in transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine literally becomes Christ's flesh and blood during communion) meant that it was very important to protect the host from any lay member who might interfere.

There are none of the earliest rood screens left,

but a few of the rarer stone screens can still be found, for example in Awliscombe. Most are made of wood, and Devon has the most. In fact, we have 110 complete screens, 10 incomplete screens and 132 that we know have been removed at some point.

The bottom of a rood screen normally consists of a series of painted panels. Churches in medieval times were not white and brown like they are these days; colour was everywhere. The walls, ceilings and floors



*Awliscombe Church rood screen*

would have been painted. Sometimes we discover hints of how the church would have been underneath the layers of modern day plaster and paint. In some cases the screens were very extravagant and the high cost of the work was often a burden for the parishioners. Martin showed us a picture of a man vomiting a dog, which represented greed!

The top of the screen normally fanned out and was decorated or carved. On top there



would be a crucifix, the Virgin Mary and St John. Sometimes there would be a rood loft but there are only about ten of these remaining. The only one left in Devon can be found in Atherington church. Rood lofts were used for storing books and for musicians and choirs. Access was via a staircase known as a vice, and even when the loft has been removed we often still see the staircase, for example at Broadclyst.

*Atherington Church Rood Loft*

In 1517 Martin Luther protested against the power and wealth of the church by nailing his protests to the church door. A few years later in 1534, Henry VIII appointed himself head of the Church of England and, as protestantism replaced catholicism in England, iconoclasts went around destroying or removing anything connected to the Roman church.

In 1547 a law was passed saying that rood lofts had to be removed, and the timber they were made of was sold. The iconoclasts smashed stained glass windows, defaced carvings and rood screens were their pet hate! Many were lost in this way. Recently surviving parts have been uncovered occasionally, for example in Whimple church in 1902 it was found that the steps of the pulpit being replaced were in fact made from the panels of the original rood screen; these have now been restored and are thought to be the best in Devon.

Martin showed us how we could identify the saints that often appear on rood panels, using the panels at Whimple as an example:

- The Virgin Mary: wears blue. Blue paint was paid for by the benefactor and was made from lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, costing more than gold;
- St Peter: holds a key to the gates of heaven;
- St Lawrence: has a grid iron; he was held over a fire;
- Henry VI: considered to be saintly and represented by a white stag;

- The Pope: wears a triple tiara, which popes wore up to 1586 and which weighed up to 9lb;
- St Clement: carries an anchor; when thrown into jail for being a Christian, he converted the other prisoners, and was thrown out of a boat tied to an anchor;
- St Sebastian: arrows represent him having recovered from being shot by arrows and continuing to preach against Diocletian, before being clubbed to death;
- Apollonia: holds pincers as her teeth were pulled out, before she was burnt to death! She is now the patron saint of dentistry (there is an Apollonia dentist in Exeter!);
- St Barbara: a tower represents a disagreement that she had with her father; she wanted the tower he built for her to have three windows to represent the Christian trinity. He ended up beheading her, but was later struck by lightning himself. So she is the saint of artillery and there was often a statue of her to be found in the powder room on boats.

- St Sativola: a local saint! The panel in Whimble shows her missing head, as it is said that her head was chopped off with a scythe, and where it fell a stream popped up, which became known as Sidwell. Sidwell Street in Exeter was named after this saint, and there she is depicted in a relief on the wall of the shopping centre.



*St Sativola, Sidwell Street*

Martin finished his talk by mentioning the rood screen in St Michael and All Angels Church, Heavitree. Den Perrin found out information about the screen, which

can be found in the guide that he has written. I thought it might be interesting to include this information, so I have retyped this section of the publication for your enjoyment.

*Excerpt from "Guide to Heavitree Church"*

These paintings are of two saints and eight sibylls. Sibylls were women of antiquity, mostly Greek or Roman, who were believed to possess prophetic powers. The sibylls pictured here were credited by Virgil and others with prophesying all the significant events in the New Testament. Dating these paintings is difficult as there is no record of when they first appeared in the church although there is one clue. In one of the quatrefoils is the device of a bursting pomegranate which, early in the 16th Century, was often introduced into ecclesiastical imagery as a tribute to Catherine of Aragon. If this is the connection, the paintings cannot be earlier than 1499, the year she was affianced to Arthur, Prince of Wales.



From the left:

**St Justina of Padua** (martyred 303 AD). This panel shows a kneeling figure whose bosom is transfixed by a sword. It has been suggested that, as there is no apparent connection between this Saint and Heavitree, the screen may have been associated with a woman named Justina who lived in the parish in the late 15th century.

**St Lucy of Syracuse, Sicily** (martyred between 284 - 305 AD). A female figure whose neck is transfixed by a sword.

**Sibylla Delphica** Lived in Delphi in 2902 BC. She traditionally foretold the fall of Troy and is shown carrying a crown of thorns.

**Sibylla Hellespontia** Lived in 551 BC and came from the Hellespont. The figure carries a cross and a burning rod.

**Sibylla Tiburtina** who came from Tivoli and was consulted by Emperor Augustus, 27 BC - 14 AD. The figure carries the pillar of flagellation.

**Sibylla Cuma or Cimarìa** who came from Cimarò, Italy. The figure carries three nails and she prophesied the crucifixion.

**Sibylla Cumana** who came from Cumae in Asia Minor and lived in the 6th Century BC. The figure carries a sponge on a reed and also prophesied the crucifixion.

**Sibylla Egyptia or Agrippina** This figure carries two scourges and foretold Christ's scourging.

**Sibylla Erythrea** who came from Erythrea in Asia Minor and lived before the Trojan Wars. The figure carries a sword in her right hand and a horn in her left. The initials 'NC' to the right of the figure's head might be the initials of one of the Courtenay family whose arms are displayed elsewhere in the church. It has also been suggested that they represent 'nomine Catherina' - another reference to Catherine of Aragon.

**Sibylla Samia** who came from the Greek island of Samos. The figure carries a cradle and prophesied that Jesus would be born of a virgin.

## September 2014 Meeting - General Business

Memories of 1914 Exhibition: Percy Prowse, Mayor of Exeter, sent a letter to the society passing on his thanks and appreciation for the exhibition's material, some of which was used at the Civic Centre exhibition and in Todd Gray's exhibition at the Guildhall.

Saturday 6th June is the BALH Local History Day - could we send a rep?

Bounds of Heavitree Walk: We will try to do this every two years, hopefully on a Saturday in June. The walk is 16 miles. There's a shorter route of about a mile, covering

the four nearest stones. Perhaps this could be done as a treasure hunt. To be discussed in March.

Archiving: Jonathan suggested that we spend some of the funds left from grants to begin to archive the vast amount of material we have, and to start making it more presentable. Several members were enthusiastic about this, and prepared to lend a hand. More details further in the newsletter.

Naming of the thoroughfare between Coop and Fore Street: The site of the Coop is where the school used to be. There was also a forge there. Perhaps this local history could influence the naming of this thoroughfare. Martin also suggested that Heavitree could recognise the work of David Morrish in the naming.

Heavitree Church Fair: Den and Mike displayed material at the fair. It was very successful, with a continuous flow of people.

HLHS Publications: Mike reported that we currently have:

Boundary Stones - 9 copies

Heavitree School - 19 copies

Retailing - 4 copies

Discovering Exeter: Public Inscriptions - 540 copies

C20th Architecture - 113 copies

Heavitree Roll of Honour - 340 copies

Jonathan will make a start digitising them.

### Blue Plaque Honours Famous Actress Sisters From Heavitree



Exeter Civic Society's latest blue plaque honours two legends of stage and screen, who both grew up in Heavitree.

Commemorated in the City Centre on a wall between Roman Walk and Southernhay, next to the blitz memorial, are Violet and Irene Vanbrugh. The plaque is situated near to a house (now demolished) where Violet was born on 11 June 1867.

Her father, Reverend Reginald Barnes, became vicar of Heavitree in 1869 and the family moved to the Vicarage there – a large early Victorian building set behind the church in a walled garden. It was here on 2 December 1872 that Irene was born, the fifth of six children and the youngest girl.

Both Violet and Irene went on to have star studded careers in the theatre using the name Vanbrugh as their stage name. One writer said “The turn of the century saw Irene Vanbrugh and her sister, Violet, with no superiors as comedy actresses on the London stage”.

Violet went on to play many Shakespearean roles as well as star in films. Irene performed in a series of plays by big name authors including J.M Barrie, Somerset Maugham, Oscar Wilde, A.A. Milne and Noel Coward. She also appeared in films and was a well known public voice as she broadcast the weekly charity appeals on the radio.

Their youngest brother, Kenneth Barnes, also born in Heavitree, became director of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He named their playhouse the Vanbrugh Theatre in honour of his sisters.

How remarkable to have three major theatre names all brought up in one Heavitree household. But what was life like for them all back then?

In ‘Discovering Exeter/Heavitree’ Trevor Falla relates how the 1881 census threw light on the Vicarage set-up. ‘Prebendary Barnes was living there with his wife, elder sister, six children, and cook, housemaid, parlour maid and nurse, both Swiss, a kitchen maid and an under housemaid’.



He also drew from Irene’s autobiography about life at that time. ‘She recalls the smell of the brewery, amateur theatricals, maypole dances on the lawns with “the village girls”, and going down the village street to the post office to buy sweets.

‘Her life was not all innocent enjoyment, however, as she also recalls that her father, opposed to corporal punishment, dealt with her offences by making her go out wearing a plain black stocking on one leg, and a striped one on the other’.

Another interesting local link with the Barnes family is the Gordon Lamp (represented in our Society logo). Reverend Barnes was a close friend of General Charles Gordon. He was so affected by the General’s death at the siege of Khartoum that he paid for the lamp at the junction of Fore Street and Magdalen Road in his memory. The inscription has the date of Gordon’s death – 26 January 1885.

Martin Weiler

### Archiving HLHS Material Update

A small group of members met to discuss how to display and archive the society's materials. This is the beginning of a huge project, but thus far we have decided:

- We will be purchasing new display boards imminently. We won't think about what

we're going to put on the boards until they arrive and have a better feel for them;

- Viv has bought a few folders and some box files to store the various folders in. Most of this material is not too bad but just needs sprucing up a little

- Jonathan is going to try to get more of the poster-sized material used for the 2002 exhibition onto the web. We will be keeping this material as it was professionally produced. It is still in decent condition and could be used at shows, etc.

### New publication - The Toll Houses of South Devon

Tim Jenkinson Co-author "The Toll-houses of South Devon" wrote to enquire whether members of the Heavitree Local History Society might be interested in purchasing a copy of a local history book entitled "The Toll-houses of South Devon" that he has co-authored with Patrick Taylor as part of a nationwide series on the subject.

The book contains photographs and accounts of all known surviving toll-houses in that part of the county that were mostly built in the 19th Century turnpike era of road management, along with descriptions of those now demolished; the Heavitree area of Exeter receives very good coverage. Numerous archive photographs complement the comprehensive gazetteer of toll-house sites and there are also details of some of the occupants of the houses, gleaned from the mid to late 19th Century Census returns.

The book has 122 pages and retails at £8.95 per copy (post and packaging is free). Books can be ordered directly from Tim at 17 Monro Mead, Liverton, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 6UL. Cheques made payable please to "T Jenkinson". His telephone number is 01626 824808.

### Spicer Road

Have you any idea how Spicer Road got its name? Mike Walker's book on street names says it is after the family of landowners and spice merchants but this seems like it might be too easy an explanation - does anyone know more? We have had a request for information via the website.

#### Upcoming History Society Events

*(all held in the St Michael's and All Angels Church, Rifford Room, 7.30pm)*

**Tuesday 10th March 2015 - Gillian Allen: Jamaica's Link with Heavitree**

**Wednesday 17th June 2015 - TBC**

**Wednesday 9th September 2015 - AGM**

#### Non History Society Events

**11 March 2015, 2pm** - Exeter Civic Society - Tour of Bowhill House

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

buried in Higher Cemetery

**9th April 2015** - Exeter History Society - Magical Beliefs & Practices in the West Country

**11th April 2015, 2pm** - Friends of Higher Cemetery - Harry Hems, sculptor in wood & stone

**11th April 2015, 11am** - Exeter Civic Society - Visit to Mathematics School, Rougemount House

*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 ANSWERS! How many did you get right?



- 1. Part of a sign on the wall of The Horse and Groom pub, directing people to the church.**
- 2. Eagle motif on the front of a house in Salutory Mount, Fore Street. If any one has any information about the history of this house, I would love to write an article about it.**
- 3. Windows on the roof of the United Reformed Church, Heavitree**
- 4. Horse trough outside Duckes Alms Houses, Fore St**
- 5. Sign in front of an Oak tree in Heavitree Pleasure Ground, commemorating the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary.**
- 6. Filled in window in Shelton Place - this would have been to avoid window tax.**

*This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society*

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