

**FORTHCOMING HLHS MEETINGS AND EVENTS**

*Unless indicated below, meetings are held at Heavitree United Reformed Church, on the second Wed of Mar, Jun, Sep & Dec, commencing at 7:30pm.*

**Wed 14<sup>th</sup> Dec 2022**

'Researching Heavitree at the Devon Heritage Centre' - Brian Carpenter

**Wed 8<sup>th</sup> Mar 2023**

'Heavitree and the Railways' - Richard Westlake

**Wed 14<sup>th</sup> Jun 2023**

'A celebration of the heritage of Victor Street, Heavitree' - A joint meeting with Heavitree Squilometre

**Wed 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023**

AGM

**A Social History of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital – Stephen Pettet-Smith**

Twenty years ago, Stephen was the Arts Officer for the RD&E, which, at one time, could boast the biggest art gallery in the South-West. As an Art graduate in Exeter, Stephen described himself as full of beans but unsure about how to make a career from art. At first, he trained to be a teacher (big mistake!), got involved in running residencies with the forestry commission, then workshops for dementia patients, before becoming an education officer for the Welsh Sculpture Trust. Here he made bold changes, including managing to bring over a Bulgarian artist past the Iron Curtain. Eventually, this experience led him back to Exeter and the RD&E, with plans to work with artists, redesign the courtyard, steer new developments, and all-in-all make the hospital more hospitable.



The picture above shows the original RD&E in Southernhay, established in 1743 by **Dean Alured Clarke** (below). In the late 1600s/early 1700s, the idea of the great and the good coming together was very popular: the idea of public service.



Clarke had trained in London and was acutely aware of the development of district hospitals at that time. When he was promoted to Dean of Winchester, the first thing he had done was to gather the important people of the area around him and found Winchester Hospital. He then moved to Exeter; just a few records show how he went about his mission to build the Devon and Exeter Hospital. He came here in 1741 and got things moving, but unfortunately died a year later. Stephen showed us a collection of superb portraits that were donated to Southernhay and acted as the PR tools of their day. Each picture was painted



either on appointment of these figures, or brought with that person coming onto the board.

**Bishop Stephen Weston**, Clarke's boss (see picture on left), extolled the parish clergy and parishioners to donate money. This was raised by subscription, relatively small, but many of them; this gained pace as people recognised the hospital was to be a reality. The next stage was to secure the land.

**John Tuckfield** (below) was a local businessperson and later both alderman of, and MP for, the city. He was the president of the board. His portrait was painted by Thomas Hudson who produced three portraits in the collection; he was

famed for his painting technique of textiles. One of Stephen's last jobs was to persuade the portraits to be gifted to the RAMM to be restored.

**Ralph Allen** (painting on next page) was born in Cornwall to a mining family. His mother was involved in the emerging postal service. At this time, many seams of copper were being discovered; those laying claim to them needed to register their ownership with an office in London. Unscrupulous people might intercept and change the name on the letter. Ralph recognised this and at 19 moved to Bath and became a postmaster. He rationalised the service in England and unified the whole system. He was the Bill Gates of his day and made a huge fortune. Once this wealth was in investments, he began opening stone quarries; the whole of Bath used this stone. These two careers made him a multi-millionaire. Having secured his place on earth, Ralph



went about buying his stairway to heaven. In the painting, he is pointing to the deed that transfers part of his fortune to the hospital. Having garnered everything, the board went about attracting the best medical men.

**John Patch Senior** (below) is painted in the mode of lecturer. He is gesturing to learned text about the human hand; there is also a flayed arm in the painting. The portrait is remarkable, because at the time the church and state were both vehemently opposed to dissection of the human body. Patch was the surgeon in Paris to James Edward Stuart (son of the deposed James of England, claimant to the English and Scottish thrones). The infant prince had been taken



to France where James II had set up his court in waiting. Looking closely at the top right of the portrait, behind some crude overpainting, is a bookshelf with volumes on. We wonder if anything will be revealed after restoration: perhaps some clues about Patch's time in Paris.

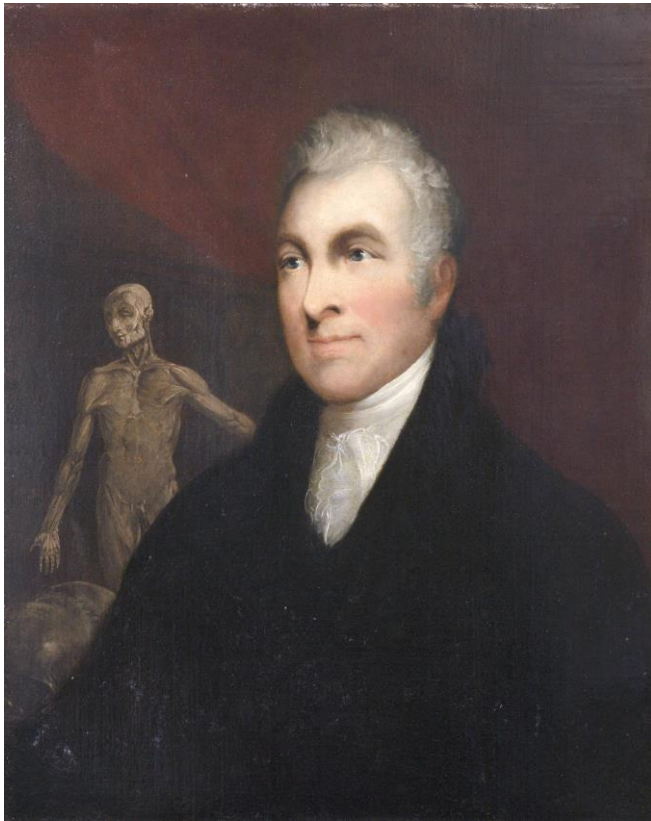
**John Sheldon**, surgeon at the RD&E, was a remarkable person. The Age of Enlightenment is embodied in some of his interests. He was somewhat bizarre. He kept the naked embalmed body of a 24-year-old woman next to his bed for thirty years. His widow gave the specimen to the RD&E. The body was believed to have been his first love, who died of consumption when he was treating her in the final stages of illness. He also once ascended in a



static balloon and was on course to travel the whole of the South Coast (but got off in Sunbury).

*[I found an interesting talk about John Sheldon. It's free to listen to and can be found [here](#)].*

The painting of Sheldon (right) is very interesting because of the figure in the background. Around 1820-25, three royal academicians were involved in discussions about how Christ's dead body would have looked on the cross. They were very interested in how the body would have ended up, and thought that the pose used by many artists was anatomically incorrect. Until 1832, the Anatomy Act stated that the only bodies legally available



for dissections were those of executed criminals. Therefore, casts of flayed cadavers were very important to medical schools and art galleries. The three academicians approached a surgeon, and in 1801 he was asked to find a suitable subject. It just so happened that he knew a judge with an 'open/shut case of murder' coming up. James Legg, a Chelsea pensioner probably suffering from dementia, challenged another pensioner in his home to a duel, shooting him through the chest. He was hanged and afterward his body dissected, casts being made, pre- and post- dissection. From these casts, smaller versions were sculpted; one is the piece depicted in this portrait, another remains in the life drawing room at the Royal Academy.

When the Southernhay RD&E site was put up for sale to private developers, Stephen and his colleagues managed to rescue the paintings. It was proposed to reunite the paintings in the boardroom at the new RD&E site in Wonford. However, there was insufficient space therein, so a new boardroom was proposed. Many, rightly or wrongly, took umbrage at this; the paintings had, after all, been in storage for many years. The portraits in the collection tell the

history of the RD&E from a really interesting angle. They were recently displayed at an exhibition in the RAMM.



As for the RD&E itself, by 1974 it had outgrown the Southernhay site, and was moved to a tower block building on the former grounds of Wonford House Heavitree, now known as RD&E (Wonford). Initially, there were complaints from night staff about the noise of gunfire from the nearby Wyvern Barracks, where the army shooting range was located.



Two people died falling from height at the hospital within a year of its opening, the first being a workman on the outside of the building, and the second a nine-year-old patient who fell down a service shaft.

In 1985, the building was the first major structure in the UK found to have concrete cancer (the alkali-silica reaction), which caused the concrete to expand and fail. It is thought that condensation from the kitchens was the primary cause.

The replacement buildings were built in several phases, the first phase being

completed in 1992. This first phase included an ophthalmic unit which replaced the West of England Eye Infirmary, previously on its own site on Magdalen Street in the city centre.



The second phase was completed in 1996, followed by the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry opening in 2004, and a new maternity and gynaecology unit, known as the Centre

for Women's Health, opening at Wonford in 2007, with maternity moving from its Heavitree site in Gladstone Road.

The Heavitree site had existed for years as a place of healing, albeit under the banner of the Workhouse. The amalgamation of the aforementioned services has proved beneficial to many.

Sally Robinson

### A.G.M.

Chairman's Report: after a pause to pay our respects to Her Majesty the Queen, Terry talked us through some of the events that we've been able to hold post COVID, including the Northbrook walk, Martin's local history walks and future events like the Boundary Walk.

Treasurer's Report: our income was reduced in 2020/21 as we weren't meeting, but we still made £250 over what we spent. 2021/22 the income has been much more normal. Room hire expenses are a little more. Last year we lost 9 members but gained 4; we currently have 49 members.

Sally Robinson

### A Stroll Through Historic Wonford

Last month, Martin Weiler and Jojo Spinks led a walk around Wonford. Martin took us through the first part and Jojo took over once we entered Wonford village, where the Squilometre research project took place. Everybody learnt so much on this walk!

#### Heavitree Pleasure Ground

We started the walk at the Pleasure Ground which was opened in 1906 by Heavitree Urban District Council. The District Council ran from 1895-1913, the Pleasure Ground being one of its lasting achievements. It was built to help solve the problem of rowdy youths playing in Fore Street in the evenings.

Given the forthcoming coronation, it was interesting to note the oak tree and



plaque which recorded its planting to commemorate the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911.

There is a good stretch of Heavitree Stone in the wall backing onto gardens in Roseland Avenue. Heavitree stone is the compressed product of a 280 million year old arid red sand desert mixed with detritus from floods including stones and

pebbles.

The wall here marks the boundary of three old fields – Lower, Middle and Higher Butts. One of the meanings of 'Butts' is a place where boys and men used to practice archery. As the fields are long and narrow maybe archery was practiced here long ago.

It is highly likely Heavitree had a Butts as an Archery Law of 1363 made it obligatory

for Englishmen to practice their skills with a longbow every Sunday. The Law "forbade, on pain of death, all sport that took up time better spent on war training especially archery practice".

Later in our walk, we would walk along Butts Road, in all probability the road leading to the Butts.

#### Main Road

As we crossed the main road we thought back to its uses over the years. It was one of the Roman routes into Exeter, a toll road with tollgates and more recently a tram route.

#### Tram Terminus

A horse drawn tram service running from Exeter to Livery Dole on the edge of



Heavitree started in May 1883. In 1905 an electric service was introduced and the line extended to Cross Park. It cost 2d to travel from the Guildhall to Heavitree. The terminus was here and looking across the road we could see possible remnants from the system. A white pillar has the writing 'Danger, Stop, Look'. There is also an arched recess nearby. Trams were replaced by buses in 1931.

### Almshouses

After crossing the road we could see Duke's Almshouses, originally built in 1603 and rebuilt in the 1850s. The horse trough in front was presented to the Parish in memory of a doctor, Erasmus Miles, in 1876. As recently as the 1950s, milkmen, coalmen, etc often used horse drawn carts, so this could have still been in use then.

### Heavitree Park

As we walked along Butts Road, we saw to the left the entrance to Heavitree Park. There is often confusion between Heavitree Pleasure Ground and Heavitree Park. Heavitree Park is in fact a series of five grand houses built in the 1820s by Edward Eardley, an Exeter China merchant, who was also later involved in the Mont Le Grand development. The name Heavitree Park reflects the taste of the well-off at the time; they wanted country houses near the city with healthy sounding names. This was underlined by the rustic cottage look of the Lodge building at the entrance. Eardley leased the land in 1825 on the condition he erected houses and outbuildings of brick and stone, not cob, to a value of £3000 each. They were built by 1829.

### The Knoll

Beyond Heavitree Park, is the site of the present Wingfield Park and Heavitree Football Ground. The importance of old maps is underlined by the different names attributed to this land over the years. The second edition of the OS map describes this land as The Knoll. In the first 1890 edition it was named as Park Villa. In the 1844 Tithe Map it was Windout Hill, later sometimes written as Windeatt Hill.

### Mowbray Maternity Hospital

Next door to Heavitree Park is a house built by James Tillyer Blunt, a retired captain in the East India Service, around 1816. He called the property Wonford Hill. It was subsequently called Mowbray House and was lived in by a variety of people including Colonel Vaughan, the Urban District Council Chairman in the early 20th century. Indeed it was Colonel Vaughan who performed the Pleasure Ground opening-ceremony in 1906. He didn't have far to go! It later became a hospital – first recorded as a home hospital under Miss Biggs and Miss Hunter in 1923. It was a well-known local maternity hospital until its closure in 1986. For a time after this the building was used for Nursing training. It is now a residential property again.

### Mowbray Cottage

Also on Butts Road is Mowbray Cottage which began life as an independent, maybe Congregational, Chapel in 1833. By 1851 it appeared to be used by



Wesleyan Methodists but by 1860 had ceased to be used for religious purposes and became a private residence. It was used as a nurses' home at one stage.

### Wonford

We then walked down Butts Road to its junction with Wonford Street. Wonford Village was part of the historic royal manor of Wonford, and was named after the old name for the

Northbrook: Wynford. As you stand at the junction you can look back to Heavitree Parish Church on high land looking down on the Village. There is a direct line down Wonford Street to the site of the Manor House at the far end. Church and Manor were there as prominent landmarks. This shows the power relationship in the 12<sup>th</sup> century: the serfs/people would be living between these two powers at each end of the village: church and lord. Yeomen would have



rented burgage plots from the lord, thus he would have held that village. Back-alleys like Hope Lane and Bovemors indicate that the village is likely to have been

planned this way, as statement of 'you belong to me'!

The 1901 map of this area shows remnants of medieval settlements and three main centres of population: Wonford village, the quarries, and the centre of Heavitree. In the past, Heavitree was the outlier of Wonford and would've gradually grown. Now we think of Wonford as the outlier of Heavitree.

#### **More on Heavitree Stone**

Everywhere you look in Wonford, Heavitree and Exeter you can see the red of Devon. The red colour is oxidised iron and tells us that this area was an entirely arid desert.



The other characteristic the stone has is jumbled up sharp stones inside it. Geologically this tells us that at this point it was deposited in a series of quick, flash events – all materials were mixed up and dumped really quickly. Exmouth stone is red but uniform with all stones the same size – it would have been much calmer. The blocks we see can tell us the history of how it was laid down. John Allen has records of stone quarried in Wonford/Heavitree going back as early as the 1100s. It was used in the underground passages and cathedral. The height of extraction was in the 1400s/early 1500s. This was linked to coming out of the

extreme stress of the Black Death. So many artisans and builders were lost. If you were a quarryman here your status would have been elevated.

Heavitree stones remain in a red medieval skeleton of our city.

Interestingly the quarries re-opened briefly



after the Blitz, for rebuilding parts of Sidwell Street and other damaged buildings.

#### **Hope Hall**

This building was built as a chapel in 1905 and used until 1931 when they moved to the new chapel on Wonford Street. It has had various uses over the years, and for a while was Heavitree's Community Centre. When it was decorated, they found the baptismal font was still there under the floor. It made good storage!

#### **Hope Place**

Just up from the hall are eight terraced cottages built in 1890. They shared a common water pump and probably privy, as was common at that time.

#### **Cherry Gardens**

This small development of houses from the 1960s was built originally for staff and families of the prison service. It was built on the cherry orchard run by the Langdon family, who also had a butcher's on Woodwater Lane. The orchards were used for a cherry brandy made locally; The Heavitree Brewery later owned it and claimed it was the best you could buy.

#### **31-35 Wonford Street**

This is evidence of the Exeter Blitz. A bomb killed two here, and left a crater 43 foot in diameter and 15 foot deep!

#### **Vine Cottage**

This is probably the oldest building on the street, built before 1800 but with more recent changes visible. In 1834 a robbery occurred and £30 was stolen from William Barrell while he and his family were at church.

Subsequently the family must've fallen on hard times as William was sent to debtors' prison in 1845 and committed

suicide by jumping into the River Exe in 1852. In 1861 John Madge, a licenced victualler, bought the cottage. We spotted some hops growing there today, in one of the greenhouses.



### **Verney House and no 47 Wonford Street**

These two red brick buildings were built in the 1850s. No 47 was originally a shop and just a quick look at its occupation over the years shows it being a coal merchant, hairdresser's, tv repair shop, video rental shop and gas appliance shop before being converted into flats in the 2000s.

There is water running under the road which could well be the culverted Blackbrook water course, which once ran through the village and likely filled the moat of the great house.

### **Scudders Buildings**



This row of workers' cottages, originally thatched, was built in the 1860s. They were home to railway workers, carpenters, labourers and bricklayers. William Gibbs, a labourer for the council, lived at number 61 in 1911 with his 8 children and wife – all in one tiny cottage. Well known character Granny Lake lived at number 63 and would sit outside

making Honiton Lace. There were two toilets outside for the whole block. These were eventually moved inside due to the risk of Scarlet Fever, but the house dwellers were reluctant.

### **South Wonford Terrace**

These were more working-class houses, built in the 1840s to house gardeners and labourers. As Wonford Village became less reliant on local farms and orchards from the 1900s onwards, the houses became homes to dressmakers, nurses and cab drivers. Originally built as two-up



two-down cottages, the number of occupants ranged from 1-8, as people would often rent out a room to supplement their income. For example, the Sinclair family of 6 also had 2 lodgers.

### **Heavitree & Wonford United Services Victory Hall**

This was built in 1922 by local veterans who served in WW1 as a meeting place for the local community and a way to remember fallen service men.

### **South Wonford Infants' School**

A typical example of a Victorian school, this building dates from 1878 and originally educated around 60 children aged 4-7. A year later an additional classroom and chapel was added. Almost every house in Wonford Street had children who attended the school. It ceased to be used for teaching in the 1940s and is now flats.



### **Draycott Close**

This is the site of Abbott's Farm. There used to be four acres of orchards here, as well as a fine thatched farmhouse. The house was demolished in 1964 to make way for Draycott Close.

### **Wonford Garage**

This 'old school' garage is on the site of what used to be Shepherd's Court – a terrace of workers' cottages. In 1956 the business was owned and run by JK Pritchard and Sons. To this day it is run by the Pritchard family.

### **Murder/Suicide**

Near to this area on a February morning in 1933, neighbours heard gunshots coming out of one of the cottages nearby. A woman was found with one foot out of a downstairs window, apparently trying to escape. She had a severe gunshot wound to the back, and died on the way to hospital. Her husband was found inside with his head partially blown away. He was holding a double-barrelled shotgun with a cord attached to the trigger.

### **Cornish Units**

During WWII, many homes were destroyed and people were left with nowhere to live. The Central Cornwall and Artificial Stone Company put up thousands of these houses, built to be temporary and only last 10 years. Many still stand, like

those in Butts Road, built in the 1950s.

### Fort Villa

As Wonford Village expanded in the 1800s, a number of larger houses were built alongside the workers' cottages. Built in 1826, Fort Villa is one of these. An example of a grand villa that would've been occupied by 'the gentry'. Alfred Brooking lived here between 1897 and 1926; he was chairman of Heavitree Urban District Council. Apparently when he died he left the request that he be buried with an open bottle of chloroform. Fort Villa was converted into a residential home for the elderly in the 1960s, reputedly Exeter's first.

### Site of Smith's Dairy

Where St Loye's Court is now, there used to be a dairy in the 1900s. Charlie Smith and his son Tom had a dairy farm at the top of Quarry Lane and sold and delivered milk by horse and cart from this site. Apparently, Charlie used to sometimes drink too much cider but his horse knew the way around.

### Wonford Inn

This was previously a private house known as Oakbeer Cottage and part of a farm. It became a pub in 1866. It is the last of the three pubs servicing Wonford Village but looks set to close.



### Wonford Great House

The Great House would have faced the village and looking at Coronation Road we can almost see the shape of where it would have been. Now there is a care home where it stood. A lot of heritage was lost as developers moved quickly and didn't give archaeologists the chance to investigate what might have been left there. Early pottery from the Great House has been discovered, dating from the late 1100s / early 1200s; the time of King John. We think that the DeMandeville's owned the house, although it was unlikely that they lived there. By 1236 it seems to have gone to the Gervaise family: Walter and Nicholas. These would have been French/Norman noble families.

The Squilometre research has concluded that the house:

- 1) Sat on a square plot of around 700 metres square including square moat.

- 2) Its front gate would have faced the village with a small bridge over the moat
- 3) It would have had a steeply gabled roof and small windows
- 4) The very first house dating to around AD1200 may even have been timber but later versions were almost certainly constructed from our very own, red, Heavitree stone

They used a local artist, Steve Bramble, to help design a logo based on these facts, and this can be seen on their information board where the house would have stood.



The Wonford Trail can be found here: <https://www.placeify.co.uk/wonfordtrail>

Sally Robinson

### Researching a Heavitree Silk Merchant

While wandering around the graveyard at Pinhoe Church, I was struck by scale of a memorial in the distance and so ventured over for a closer look. It proved to have a Heavitree connection.

The grave inscription said, 'In loving memory of Stafford Northcote Green of Heavitree'. Intrigued by this I set out to see if I could find out who he was. Information on the internet quickly provided a lot of detail. The Devon Heritage



Centre holds a 1900 mortgage document which states 'Stafford Northcote Green, formerly of Stafford Lodge, Heavitree, now of Exeter, silk mercer'. This tells us his trade – a silk mercer was a dealer in silk - and also where he lived when in Heavitree. Where is/was Stafford Lodge? Our own Heavitree Local History Society website had the answer to this.



Stafford Lodge was a large, detached building facing the Livery Dole Almshouses. It was built between 1851 and 1861. It is still there today although now known as Rowancroft, part of the University of Exeter complex there. It stands behind a large listed Heavitree Stone boundary wall along the main road into Heavitree.

We have a man named Stafford, and a house named Stafford. I was keen to delve

some more. Thankfully on a genealogy site someone had posted some very useful background details. It turns out that Stafford Lodge belonged to Edward Green (1805-1876), also a silk merchant. He was the son of a brewery manager from Watford.

Edward married Sarah in 1842. She was the daughter of Stafford Northcote. In 1843 their elder son was born and named Stafford Northcote Green. This son

later carried on the family's silk business which operated out of 25 High Street, Exeter.

Presumably when they had the Lodge built in Heavitree they named it after the family name of Stafford. It's a name with great Devon connections. Sarah's great grandfather was Sir Henry Northcote, 5<sup>th</sup> Baronet, who lived at Pynes on the outskirts of Exeter. He had moved there when he married Bridget Stafford. Pynes was the Stafford family home.

The names Stafford and Northcote have quite a bit of resonance, becoming family names and the name of a grand Heavitree house.

*Footnote: Stafford Lodge was renamed Rowancroft in 1890 and used as a girls' school until 1921. By 1927 it was an elementary school for boys in training for holy orders. In 1943 it was requisitioned by the Army Pay Corps. It was rocked by tragedy when one of the female soldiers was murdered in the house by an American serviceman stationed in the city.*

Martin Weiler



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

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