# H eavitree L ocal H istory S ociety



Newsletter No. 88 Mar 2023

#### 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 8th 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> Sep 2023

AGM

Wed 13th Dec 2023

TBC

# Researching Heavitree at the Devon Heritage Centre

# - Brian Carpenter

December's meeting had a definite local society feel about it. We began with Terry offering us free tomatoes: 'we don't want to see any left in this box by the end', and the meeting itself was interrupted multiple times by a fire alarm, apparently triggered by the model railway enthusiasts downstairs being over zealous with the steam.

Despite the interruptions, our speaker, Brian Carpenter, left us all very excited at the thought of how much Heavitree-related information lies at the Heritage Centre; his talk was really interesting.

Brian has long had links with the HLHS: he was originally contacted by Den Perrin in 2006, Martin and Mike came on an early tour of the Heritage Centre, and Mike



now volunteers there. He was involved when Den developed his project about the annexation of Heavitree in 1913.

# Devon Heritage Centre:

The Devon Record Office was founded in 1952 as part of the movement for creating a systematic holding of records post WWII – this hadn't happened much before the war. It had various bases – the old City Library building and a warehouse on Marsh Barton.

In 1998 Devon County Council bought Great Moor House from BT, and when the Heritage Lottery Fund gave them money to convert it, the Record Office moved there in 2005.

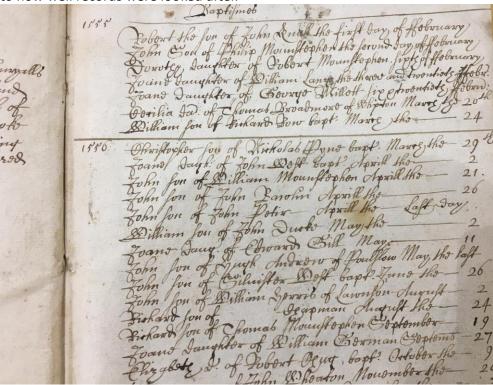
In 2012 they amalgamated with the Westcountry Studies Library (which held published materials and was in a separate building in town) to form the Devon Heritage Centre. There are branch offices in Barnstaple and Plymouth. In 2014 the South-West Heritage Trust was founded, with Somerset and other museums. The Centre is open Tuesdays to Thursdays 10-5pm, with Mondays and Fridays reserved for behind the scenes work – lots of cataloguing, clearing, processing, etc, plus tours, open days and group visits. Since the Covid pandemic, advance booking via the website is required. Brian showed us the online catalogue, which is the main way to find details of what they hold. There is more on the card indexes (dating from the 1950s) at the Centre.

Brian said that in an average week, three or four packages of 'things' arrive to be processed. These could be van-loads of information from businesses or just a few

leaflets. There are always things of interest being found in lofts, cellars, collections from societies, local government etc. Before anything can be stored, it has to be repackaged and referenced.

#### What Devon Heritage Centre holds:

- Parish records: records of baptisms, marriages, burials, etc. The earliest record is from 1538, and the earliest from Heavitree is 1555. Records survive for 450 parishes, from most parts of the county. Some have lots and some very little as a lot has been lost over the years. Heavitree is an exception – the collection for Heavitree is one of the largest and most comprehensive. In the past, Heavitree was a rural village outside the city so the fact that so much survived is a tribute to how well records were looked after.



- school records: mostly for primary schools, these include admission registers, log-books with details of day-to-day events (evacuees, Blitz, boys not coming to school due to helping with the harvest, etc)
- hospital and asylum records: these records of Southernhay, plus Exminster, Digby, and Wonford House asylums give a huge insight into mental health care in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- records of 'Landed Families' and their estates: vast amounts of material on landholding title deeds, surveys, what the land was used for, old and interesting

maps. Relating to families like the Courtneys, Aclands, Rolle, etc.

- records of the Diocese of Exeter and local authorities
- records of clubs and societies
- records of courts

#### What Westcountry Studies Library holds:

Primarily printed material related to Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Cornwall, Bristol and Bath.

- books: research, novels, street and trade directories
- photographs and illustrations
- newspapers: more often than not, people use the National Newspaper Archives. It's free at the library and there are many on microfilm that aren't online yet.

- early printed maps and OS maps from 1880s onwards (the DHS holds

manuscript maps, but the WSL hold printed ones)

# Rules for the Good Governance of the Parish 1586:

This large piece of parchment contains articles relating to governance, drawn up by a group called Four Men of Heavitree. We assume they were senior members of



the parish community. Brian transcribed a couple of sections which had details about the strict keeping of records: it had been decided upon by the Four Men and all parishioners of the church that records would be kept in a strong chest bounded with iron with three locks and three keys (this would have been kept in the church).

#### Survey of the Manor of Heavitree, 1740:

The 'manor' of Heavitree differed slightly from the parish. It was a slightly different legal constitution originating in the feudal system – historically the main system of governance would have been via the lord of the manor, manorial courts, etc.

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This survey is pretty typical: it gives lists of properties, with names of tenants, their rent, and technicalities. Some place names are recognisable. There is reference to the Royal Oak and the name of the landlord at that time. Heavitree at that time was rural. There were a total of 9 acres attached to the pub itself. The Royal Oak moved at some point, probably just up the street. The current building is probably 19<sup>th</sup> century. The document

shows how the names of pubs persist through history.

## Milking Cows Without Permission, 1740:

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This story is part of the ongoing project to catalogue court sessions. There were four each year. In Exeter there were two sets: the Devon Quarter Sessions and the Exeter Sessions (Exeter was classed as a county AND a city). These sessions were the main way that less serious crimes were tried. The sessions also had admin responsibilities which were later passed onto county councils (things like the requirement to repair roads). This extract is an example of the sort of crime that would be tried in the quarter sessions: a woman called Mary was accused of breaking and entering and feloniously obtaining 5 quarts of milk from two cows.

## The Ruinous State of Heavitree Road, 1747:

This document condemns the mile-long stretch of road from the old workhouse (where Waitrose now stands) towards Honiton, home of the gallows. It describes the road as very ruinous, deep, broken and in decay, saying that liege-people

(citizens) could not pass in their horses, coaches, and carriages without great danger.

#### Churchwarden's Account, 1780:

This details money collected from citizens and paid out for expenses of the church.

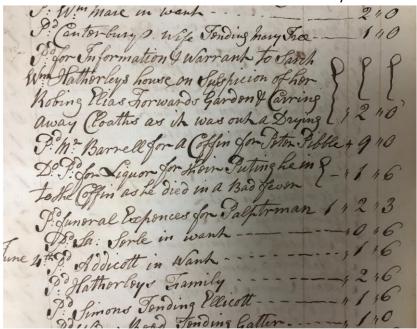
# Overseers of the Poor Accounts, 1783 (Heavitree Parish):

This records the collection of poor rates and redistributions to the poor of the parish. There were some standard expenses here:

- coffin for Peter Pibble (a poor person)
- liquor for putting him into the coffin as he died in a bad fever (this would be drink given to the undertakers)

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- 'Information and warrant to search William Hatherly's house on suspicion of



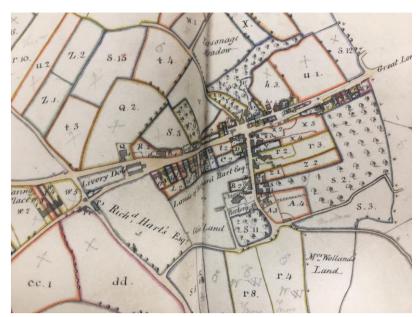
her robing Plias Forward's garden and carrying away cloaths as it was owt a drying.' This is standard stuff but is all part of fabric the of the history of the parish.

# The Parish Commemorates the Golden Jubilee of George III, 1809:

A story not so far away from our current times. This is from the minutes of a vestry meeting – an aspect of the parish that governed things prior to a Parish Council. In this 50<sup>th</sup> year it was decided that a special collection would be taken from landowners and householders and de-distributed amongst the working poor and those receiving parochial relief. We can see John Baring paid £1 1s.

# Map of the Manors of Heavitree and Mount Radford, Owned by Thomas Baring, 1816:

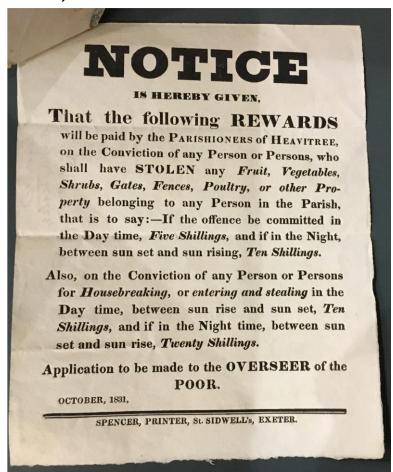
This is a good example of an intricate, coloured, hand drawn map. We can see a number of orchards. The letters and numbers cross refer to more details.



#### Mount Radford and Larkbeare, 1816:



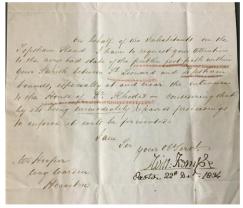
#### Overseer's Notice, 1831:



This poster offers an incentive to anyone who can help apprehend people of committing crimes locally.

# Letter to Parish Highway Surveyors, 1834:

This letter, on behalf of the inhabitants of the Topsham Road, was complaining about the state of the road, in particular the footpath in front of the house of Dr Rhodes. The letter threatened that unless it was repaired <u>immediately</u>, they would take action and go to the justice of the peace at the Quarter Sessions.



#### Heavitree Parish Tithe Map, 1843:

The giving of a 10<sup>th</sup> of your land's income was phased out by 1836, so maps were drawn up of tithing areas. They are superb sources for tracing the history of parishes.



# Heavitree Bridge, 19<sup>th</sup> Century:

This is from a volume of illustrations of bridges throughout the county, produced for the Quarter Sessions. They are wonderful drawings. You can see the Turnpike Gate is marked, just past the bridge.

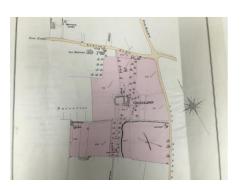






# Sale Catalogue: Gras Lawn, 1911:

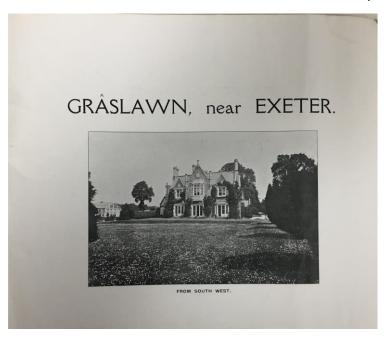
The Heritage Centre has thousands of these. Gras Lawn had a cricket ground attached. Brian used to play cricket there with Martin! Now there is a housing estate, or perhaps the Orthopaedic Hospital on it. The catalogue shows plans, what's included, and the land attached; there were often photos, too.





Thank you very much to Brian for showing us all these treasures in the Heritage Centre. Many of us were inspired to find out more. We are hoping to organise a HLHS visit as soon as we can.

Sally Robinson



Digby - City of Exeter Lunatic Asylum Part 1: 1890



I recently obtained some old minutes from Exeter City Council meetings (rescued from a skip!), which provide very interesting snapshots of Exeter life in the last 140 years. The minutes from the Asylum Committee are particularly interesting, and give us a glimpse into the institution at various points over the years. This series of articles will be based on those snapshots – not a comprehensive history of the asylum, but just a peek in at various points in time (and, of course, seen through the subjective eyes of the Council Asylum Committee).

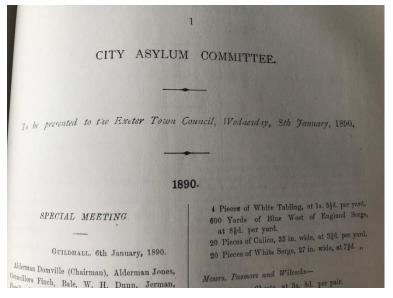
In the late 1800s, Heavitree was not yet part of Exeter, but the city sometimes took land to build facilities for which there wasn't room in Exeter. One of these was the Exeter City Lunatic Asylum. There was already a private mental hospital for the rich at St Thomas, which was replaced by the larger Wonford House (also in Heavitree parish) in 1869, but in 1880 the city decided to build its own municipal lunatic asylum, to treat the pauper lunatics of Exeter.

The land that was chosen was part of Digby Farm, within the old Heavitree parish. It was near to the railway line, which would allow for building materials to be transported, and in 1908, a passenger station named 'Clyst St Mary and Digby Halt' was opened (350 metres from the current location).

The asylum was designed by Robert Stark Wilkinson. Exeter Memories describes the layout:

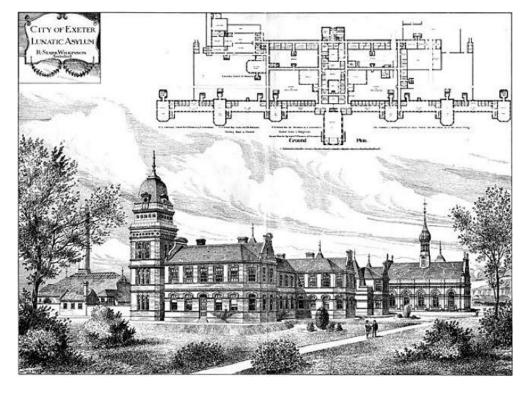
'The building, of some 237 metres (777 ft) in length, was split into the more utilitarian north-western range containing the service, administration, and

laundry rooms, along with accommodation for the laundry workers. The south-eastern range was a series of male and female 'inmate' areas separated by a recreation hall. In the centre of the range was a grand entrance



into the main hall, as befits such a building. At one end of each range was a large tower, of differing design. There was also a farm for the asylum, to the south-east of the main block, providing work for the male patients.'

The first set of records that I looked at dates from 1890, when the asylum was still being equipped. The accounts list purchases and services carried out: blankets, bedding, furniture, rugs, cutlery, carpeting, oil baize, brushes, oak posts and painting oils, sheets, trousers, armchairs, counterpanes, sheets, glass and earthenware, painting and writing, ironmongery, repairs to wire fences and 'town dues on stone'.



The council had to deal with a letter from W. Burrow, complaining that his tender for the supply of flour to the asylum had not been accepted, despite it being the lowest. The council informed him that:

'samples sent were made into bread before the committee arrived at a decision, and that they were of the opinion that the small increase in the price of flour paid was more than compensated for by the superior quality.' In 1890 the annual balance sheets showed that the asylum loan, taken out in 1886, of £90,000 and a further £7,000, had been paid off by £7,381.

The City Asylum Committee met each month. In January 1890 they were mainly discussing tenders for goods. The clothing purchased gives us an idea of what the patients would have been wearing: '10 dozen men's caps, 8 pieces of check shirting, pairs of flannel drawers, flannel vests, shawls, men's stockings, 60 pairs of light cord trousers, 2 pieces of dress ticking, 20 dozen women's stockings, 10 dozen flannel chemises, 600 yards of Wincey, 6 dozen pairs of stays, 6 pieces of striped skirting, 20 dozen women's hats, 10 dozen pairs of braces, men's and women's boots and slippers.'

In March, there was discussion about setting aside wards for private patients, and also accommodating patients from London, Tiverton, Barnstaple and other Devon Unions. This seemed to worry the 'Corporation of the Poor' – a letter from their clerk demanded to know whether the weekly charge for lodging the city's lunatics would be reduced to match the amount that would be charged for the 'metropolitan lunatics'. The committee replied, reassuring him that only the 'better class of patients are to be received and that such patients can be maintained at a less expense than can acute and violent cases.'

Despite this, a compromise was suggested: 'being anxious to meet the views of the Corporation of the Poor, the Committee have offered to reduce the charge to 12s 10d per week, provided all the lunatics now at the Workhouse (which are chronic cases, the cost of whose maintenance is less than that of acute cases) are also sent to the asylum.' We find out in April that the Corporation for the Poor refused to move these patients, deeming it 'inexpedient'. The Asylum Committee dug their heels in accordingly and refused to reduce the charge per patient.

The Commissioners in Lunacy made their annual inspection and it all sounded very positive:

'the various day rooms and corridors present throughout a very bright aspect, and are made cheerful by the prints on the walls and the abundant supply of plants and ferns. The healthy appearance of the latter is perhaps due to the absence of gas, and the advantage in this respect which the asylum has of being lighted by electricity.'

Great praise was given to Dr Rutherford and attention was drawn to the Medical Officer's report:

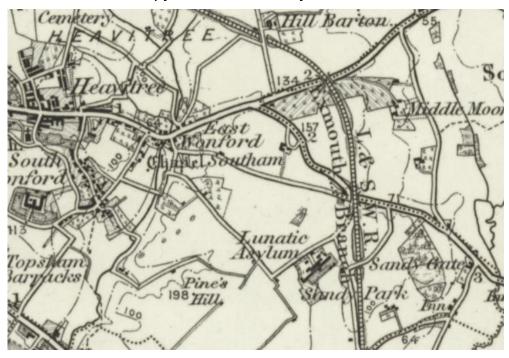
'... I have called attention to the great importance of early treatment of insanity; but I am afraid that until the public can be made to understand that insanity is simply one kind of brain disease, and that if treated early many

varieties of it are very curable, the unfortunate patients will continue to be either retained at home or in workhouses until the curable stage of their mental disorder is past.'

Other observations from the commissioners were:

'a woman having sustained fracture of the spine, though for several months thereby paralysed, has recovered from that injury and was today running about a ward ...'

'6 men and 8 women were in bed today, some of them to allay excitement and not really ill. Four males and 7 females are registered as being under medical restraint, and no one was under mechanical restraint or seclusion. There has been no resort to the former method of treatment, and but few patients have been subject to the latter – 8 men for an aggregate of 57 hours, and 1 woman once only for an hour and a half.'



O.S. map 1892-1908

'The epileptics are 24, and the actively suicidal stated to be 12. All these sleep under continuous supervision at night, and for constant watch over those dangerous to themselves proper instructions in writing are issued to the staff. We, however, today saw a suicidal woman left alone in bed, in whose case

the special instructions were not withdrawn.'

'The provision of clothing for both sexes is good, and their general appearance in the better wards (!) is satisfactory. Except in one ward, where there are certainly a very degraded and noisy class of patients, the inmates of the asylum under certificates behaved well in our presence. Their excitement, we believe, was to some extent due to want of sufficient outdoor exercise. There was no turbulence on the male side. It is only fair to say that most of the excited and untidy women had contracted bad habits before their admission here.'

The commissioners did seem concerned by the lack of exercise that patients were getting, and recommended that Exeter Council give permission to construct a boundary walk for daily use, particularly for 'those women who are unfit to be taken on the public roads.'

The diet was found to be satisfactory, except that they recommended that coffee be substituted for water at dinner, 'since beer is no longer given in many asylums ... the other general beverage of the working class should be given to patients.'

Regarding work, they found that, 'looking to the returns of employment, the male patients induced are 46, the female patients 52, of the former 18 only on land, of latter 10 in the laundry, in the kitchen and offices, and 16 at needlework ... 10 men and 16 women (are) chiefly employed as ward cleaners.'

Accounts for the rest of 1890 were mostly concerned with spending and income. Items purchased give us a good idea of what was being eaten: cheese, butter, eggs, cocoa, coffee, split peas, bacon, dried fruit, tea, caraway seeds, jam, haricot beans, lard, mustard, pearl barley, tapioca, treacle, pepper, sago, nutmegs, Liebig Company's Extract of Meat, rice, ginger, corned compressed beef, best ox, heifer beef and best ewe, flour ...

Non-edible items are also interesting: genuine white lead, machine oil, petroleum, lump whiting, rotten stone (?!), hearthstones, bee's wax, black lead, 'blue thumb', Bryant and May's Safety Matches, good light Scotch snuff, soap (disinfecting), soap (grey), soap (Milbay Laundry), good shag tobacco, Englebert's Lubricant, rental of telephone, allowance to patients on trial/working, wines, spirits and beer ...

In December, the Committee finally announced that they would reduce the charge for the Exeter patients from Lady Day (25<sup>th</sup> March).

The Superintendent of the Fire Brigade, a Mr Pett, came and examined the

building and its means for the extinction of fire. He recommended ways of using water from the (very leaky) City Water Works and the Asylum Well and Reservoir; he also found the asylum fire hydrants completely useless, suggested the purchase of one 30ft Telescopic Fire Escape and said that the male attendants should be instructed in the use of fire appliances, etc. He finished by suggesting that the Fire Hose should <u>not</u> be used for 'flushing drains, etc'!

In the next newsletter, I'll write about the asylum in 1918 and 1919. As you can imagine, the picture is very different from the one I have just painted. In 1890 the asylum was newly opened – there was a feeling of optimism and hope. A lot was about to change over the next few decades as we move from Victorian Exeter to Exeter reeling from the horrors and deprivation of WWI.

Sally Robinson



This photo amalgamation by Jerry Bird (Exeter Memories) shows the position of Digby Hospital in relation to what is there now.

7

#### CITY ASYLUM COMMITTEE.

Messrs. J. Damerel and Son-	170	Dried Fruit, Currants, p. cwt. 28s. 30s.
Genuine White Lead, at per	1 15 0	Ditto, Saltanas, per cwt 42s. 44s.
cwt 1 5 6	0 0 10	Ginger, whole, at per lb o o 7
Thirds Glass, 21 ozs. to the	086	Haricot Beans, at per bushel o 7 o
Foot, at per foot o o 2]	0 0 5	Lard, best quality, at per lb. o o 41
Fourth ditto ditto o o 21		Liebig Company's Extract of
Best Machine Oil, at per gall. o 1 11	0 2 11	Meat, at per 4 oz. pot 0 2 12
Best Raw Linseed Oil, at		Matches, Bryant and May's
per gallon 0 2 2½	060	Patent Safety, at per gross o 6 o
Turpentine, ditto o 3 112		Mustard, Colman's or Keen's
Best Boiled Linseed Oil, ditto o 2 6	0 0 7½	Genuine Fine, at per lb o o 7½
Best Petroleum, ditto o o 81	0 2 10	Nutmegs, at per lb 0 3 0
Lump Whiting, at per cwt o 2 3	0 14 3	Pearl Barley, at per cwt o 14 o
Rotten Stone, at per lb o o 1	069	Peas, Split Best Boiling, p bshl. o 6 3
Emery Cloth, at per quire o 1 4		Pepper, whole, at per lb.,
Sand Paper, ditto 0 0 7	0 0 9	rs, 8;d., 0 0 8
Hearthstones, at per hundred o 3 10	0 15 0	Rice, good Patna, at per cwt. o 18 o
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	0 2 4	Salt, at per cwt 0 2 10
Messrs. Wilcocks & Wilcocks—	0 0 3	Saltpetre, at per lb o o 3
Cocoa, Fry's Flakes, at p. cwt. 2 13 0		Snuff, good light Scotch, at per lb 0 2 8
Coffee, whole, roasted, at p. lb. o 1 23	0 2 8	Soap, disinfecting, Mac
Sugar, Raw (Demerara), at		Dougal's, at per cwt., 30s.,
per cwt 0 17 6	1 5 6	258 1 0 6
		Soap, grey (B.B.B.), at per
Mrs. M. A. Loram—	0 10 0	firkin of 64lbs, 0 10 6
Allspice, whole, at per lb o o 5		Soap, Milbay Laundry, at per
Arrowroot, St. Vincent, ditto o o 10	1 0 102	cwt
Bacon, Best Smoked Canadian,	0 3 0	Soda, at per cwt 0 3 3
by the side, at per lb 0 0 6	176	Starch, best quality, per cwt. 1 7 3 Sugar, Tate's Cubes (No. 1),
er. Bath Bricks, at per dozen o o 6	1 2 0	at per cwt 1 0 6
ler. Bee's Wax, at per lb o 1 51	1 2 0	Ditto, ditto (No. 2), ditto o 19 o
Black Lead, Crane's, per cwt 2 2 0	0 0 21	Tapioca, at per lb 0 0 21
Blacking, Day and Martin's		Tea (from 18. 6d. to 18. 9d.
Paste, at per gross 0 2 6	0 1 6	per lb.), at per lb o t 6
Blue, Thumb, best quality, at per lb 0 0 71 at per lb 0 8 2d.	0 4 0	Treacle, at per cwt 0 14 0
Carrayway Seeds, at per lb. 3½d. & 3d.	0 3 2	Tobacco, good Shag, per lb. o 3 2
Corned Compressed Beef, finest, at per 14lb. tin 0 5 6	0 0 91	Vinegar, Malt, at per gallon o o 9

This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society

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Please contact us with any enquiries via the form on our website: www.heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk