



Newsletter No. 90

Sep 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 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023

AGM + 'Meeting the promise of "Homes for Heroes" in Heavitree after the First World War' - Julia Neville

#### Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2023, 2pm

Guided walk around Higher Cemetery. Michael Parrott from the Friends of Higher Cemetery will lead a walk around some of the most interesting graves and features. Please meet at 2pm outside the Chapel opposite the WWI graves at the St Mark's Ave end of the Cemetery.

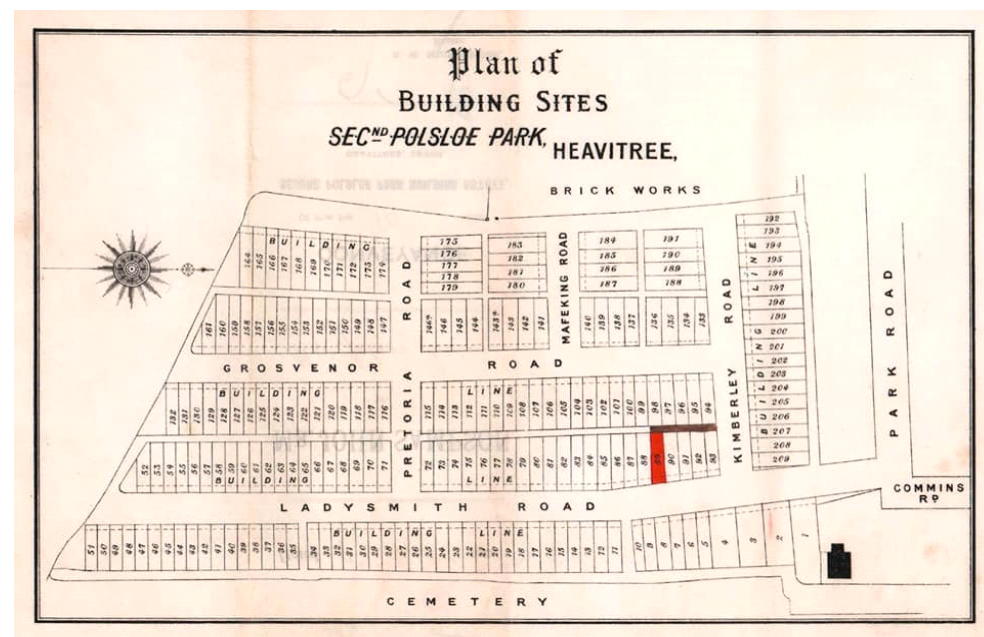
#### Wed 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2023

TBC

### A Celebration of the Heritage of Victor Street – Joint meeting with Heavitree Squilometre

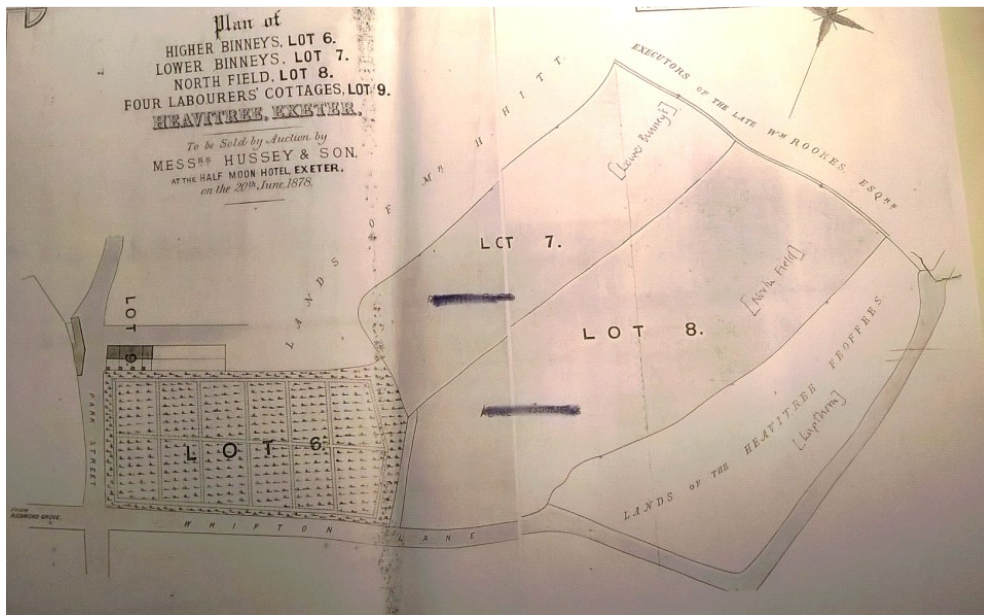
To begin this meeting, Martin described what happened to Heavitree in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For hundreds of years, Heavitree had been a sleepy, agricultural parish, quite separate from Exeter. It was also the biggest parish around Exeter – we know it stretched about twenty miles to beat the bounds.

In 1801, the census tells us that there were 833 people living in the whole parish (over 500 of whom had agriculture as their source of income). By 1901 there were 7529 – the population had increased by nearly 7000 people! What was going on?



To answer this, we have to understand what people in Exeter were feeling. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were probably wondering how on earth they were going to survive. Health-wise, the city stank, and cholera was ravaging. We started to see a trend of people moving out of the dirty city to Heavitree, which was considered countryside, with clean air. Adverts for schools even talked about how healthy it was, in order to attract pupils! Heavitree became a counter to Exeter, and then other industries started to grow. The railways, for example, employed hundreds, and those people wanted homes in Heavitree.

There were early developments in the 1820s in Heavitree Park – a series of five grand villas with a wooded area. Even the name 'park' gave the impression of coming to live in the countryside. This was followed by Salutory Mount, Mont le Grand and Polsloe Park Estate. The latter was a massive house and estate of fields and trees, opposite where Henry's Bar now stands. It slowly started to be sold off. When the main house was put up for sale in 1846, it was described as being in the most elevated and healthy part of Heavitree, with views and richness of scenery: a town and country residence with three carriage entrances. This really paints a picture of how Heavitree was viewed at that time.



### Jojo Spinks: Late Victorian/ Edwardian Entrepreneurial Heavitree

The Heavitree Squilometre takes a Hoskins-inspired approach of starting with what can be seen. The evidence around us shows a whole crop of Victorian and Edwardian builders taking advantage of land-owners selling off their estates, to create rapid development and promote their own social mobility.

In 1896, Heavitree set up its own Urban District Council. Jojo commented on what a dynamic, innovative feel for the modernisation of Heavitree the UDC had. Everything from trams, to gas street lighting, to the development of the Pleasure Ground was up for discussion, and there was a notable 'can-do' feel. Jojo gave us details about some



prominent Heavitree developers:

### Henry and Septimus Hitt

Henry Hitt and his son Septimus seem to have been instrumental in the development of South Lawn Terrace and Alpha Street. They also had property in other parts of Exeter including Walton Street, St Sidwells. Septimus appears to have made fortunate marriages, as his headstone shows. His was a success story, but other entrepreneurs were not so successful.

### John James Fry Ellis



Sally talked briefly about this excitable character, whose name is immortalised on a plaque at the top of Regent Square, and who also built several other properties around Exeter. He came from a poor background in Newtown, but really left a mark on Exeter, as a plumber, landlord, aspiring city councillor and property developer. Unfortunately, he seems to have died young and poor, having got into difficulties with debts, and having had to auction most of his properties.

### Robert Pengelly

As early as 1852, Robert Pengelly was involved in buying and selling land around South Lawn Terrace. He also owned the brickworks (now part of the Pleasure Ground) and was listed in the 1883 Kelly's directory as 'Brick and Tile Maker'. He lived in Roseland Villa (the big house at the corner of Roseland Crescent and Hamlin Lane). In October 1883, a Mr Timewall from Newton

Abbott, bought numbers 18 and 19 from Mr Pengelly for £500 (about £25,000 today) because he planned to move to Heavitree to live. Something made him change his mind - he decided it would be “detrimental to his interests” - and so he sold it back to Mr Pengelly a month later - but for £670 (nearer £34,000 today)! Why would the price have gone up so much and why was Mr Pengelly prepared to pay so much more?

By 1889, however, the Pengelly brothers were listed as Builders, living in East Street (off Newcombe Terrace), with the brickworks already closed. By 1893 Pengelly was in Magdalen Street, with no mention of a business at all.

### Changing Times

What these late Victorian go-getters did, was to move us from a time when land and property was owned by large estate owners like the Poltimores or the Barings, to a point, in the Edwardian period, when anything felt possible.



Suddenly we saw rows of terraces appear, often with that distinctive polychrome brickwork – Ladysmith Road, Stuart Road, Normandy Road, and there seem to have been multiple builders involved.



One piece of evidence that this building was rapid and entrepreneurial is the fact that Stuart and Normandy Road in particular follow

the original field pattern, suggesting that a field was bought, quickly

developed, and properties sold on, leaving the slightly odd 45 degree alignment of Stuart Road to South Lawn Terrace.

### Tammy Laskey: Victor Street



Tammy lives on Victor Street and is the 'Place Champion' for the Squilometre project. Victor Street was voted for by the people of Heavitree, and residents got together to share stories and experiences of living on the street. They decided to focus on bringing greenery to the street, and have secured funding to provide free window boxes for anybody who wants them.

When researching the history of the plot, the group discovered that the meadow Victor Street was built on was called 'The Witchet'. A witchet is apparently a type of poisonous lupin, brought in by the Romans. Heavitree Road was probably a Roman Road anyway, so maybe they did bring them here?

In 1897, it was described as 'grazing land'. It was purchased by H G Stokes, a butcher of 34 Fore Street (out on East Wonford Hill) and it was sold as 'freehold building land'. It was described as 2 acres (it was likely that a bit was already stolen by the houses on East Wonford Hill). As was common in this age of building, the land would be purchased and then the houses would be built, a few at a time.

H. G. Stokes had arrived in Heavitree in 1878, but in 1900 he committed suicide. An inquest at The Horse and Groom cited that he was addicted to alcohol. He shot himself in the face and took 30 minutes to die, leaving behind and wife and seven children. In 1907, 17 properties were being sold off.

Tammy's great grandmother Annie Shute was living there from around 1905-1911. Aged 8, she had 7 brothers. In 1911 they were still there, and her great, great grandfather was listed as a Mason's Labourer. Annie left Victor Street to go into service at Bystock Terrace. Tammy still lives on Victor Street and was already living there when she discovered her great grandmother had lived there too – an unexpected connection.

The Victor Street pod have a visit booked to the Heritage Centre in October, so hope to find out more about Victor Lane (simply mentioned as an unnamed lane in 1931) and other aspects of the street's history. They are also planning bunting, a parade and a picnic in the pleasure ground. There has even been talk of an exhibition in the park hub.



### **Sue Jackson: 35 Victor Street**

Sue's family lived on Victor Street for many years, and she first talked to us about censuses and what she found out from them about the street.

On the 1911 census, the odd numbers to 35 were built, but there was no end of the street mentioned.

The 1921 census was the first one that her family were on, and from this census we can see that all the houses on the street had finished being built. Many of the same families were still on the street – a few had moved to a different number house on the same street. You could see where people had been widowed because of the war. The 1921 census is particularly interesting, as in addition to asking for the residents' occupation, this one

detailed where people worked.

In the 53 houses, there was a range of occupations. There were railway workers, builders, mental hospital workers ...

Sue also looked at the old street directories in her collection, and mentioned the path to Whipton Lane from Victor Street. The first time it is mentioned, it is described in Besley's as 'here is a passage to Whipton Lane.' In 1957 and 1961 there was a dairy and builder's yard at the top of the lane. From 1994-2014 it was Apex Roofing Contractors, and is now called Build Space.



Sue herself has a very strong connection to Victor Street. Her grandfather, one of nine children, was born in Sandford on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1880, the son of Richard Bolt and Emma Dart (a saying passed down the family was that at their wedding Emma 'Darted' into church and 'Bolted' out).

William Henry Bolt had been a stoker in the Royal Navy until just before 1911 and emigrated to Nova Scotia where he had undertaken a variety of jobs. When World War I broke out, he enlisted in the Canadian Navy, again as a stoker.

Emma Jane Chanter had served as a cook in big London houses, and during one of William's

trips back to Devon, they married at St Leonard's Parish Church in Exeter on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1917 and the couple returned to Canada. Sue's mother Creina Joan Bolt was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1918 and the three of them returned to Exeter when Creina was a year old, and the family purchased 35 Victor Street. Creina lived there until her marriage in 1945. William and Emma went on to have a son, Derek Richard Bolt and Muriel Eileen Bolt.





After a long career shovelling coal on board ship, William started up his own coal delivery business (see photo of William and horse Prince in Victor Street), getting his coal from a Chanter relative who was an established coal merchant. Sue's mum used to tell her that he had no head for book-keeping



which he left to his wife. William either didn't know, or couldn't remember the names of his customers and used to write things like 'Mrs Green Curtains' or 'The Painted Lady' (who evidently overdid the make-up) in his delivery book, leaving Emma to work out who he meant. He was fond of his beer and was generous to a fault. When entering his favourite pub after he had finished his deliveries, he would happily buy everyone a drink. His wife got wise to this and used to intercept him and take his money bag off him, otherwise she was left short of

housekeeping money for the week ahead.



Creina, Derek and Muriel all went to the local Heavitree schools. One story told by Sue's mother related to Derek's school days. He frequently got the cane for misdemeanours, and got septic fingers as a result. His mother eventually got fed up and went to see his teacher. She said she perfectly



understood that he needed to be punished, but would he please do her a favour and cane the other hand as she had just managed to heal his injuries, only to have them opened up and bleeding again.

William died 13<sup>th</sup> October 1945 and Emma Jane followed him on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1946. Sue was born in December 1947 so sadly never knew either of her maternal grandparents.

Muriel had already married in August 1941 to Percy Reginald Cridlin (known always as George) and they continued to live at 35 Victor Street along with their children, Brian and Pat, until George's death on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2004, and Muriel's move to a care home in Exmouth where she died on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2008.



Derek married in December 1941 to Olive Mary Channing, and they bought a house at 9 Wyndham Avenue.



Sue's mother was still living at 35 Victor Street until she married Albert Henry Richards in December 1945. She had trained as a nurse at the Eye Infirmary before moving to the City Hospital; she was there at the time of the Blitz. She was then moved to Whipton Isolation Hospital, where she met and nursed Albert, who was suffering from TB. They went to live with Derek and Olive until December 1948 when they were given the tenancy of a prefab in Prescot Road, Redhills when Sue was a year old.

The Channings lived at 49 Victor Street and were listed in the 1939 Besley's street directory, but moved to live with Derek and Olive after

Sue's parents moved to the prefab.

Emma's mother, Mary Chanter (nee Ware), moved from the Crediton area sometime after her husband's death in 1907 to 69 Wonford Street where she is listed as the occupant in the 1939 Besley's. She evidently liked to know everyone's business and earning capacity as in a story related by Sue's mum when Derek went to visit his Gran, Mary was reputed to have said "What might 'e be earning then Derek?" and his reply was "I might be earning a fortune Gran, but I'm not". Mary died in the June quarter of 1944, age 86 – another relative Sue didn't have a chance to know.

The photo below shows Sue outside her family's home, 35 Victor Street.



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

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