

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 13th Dec 2023

Mile Lane, Beacon Heath – a hidden Heavitree treasure.

Talk by Nick Roseveare and members of the Mile Lane Pod. The meeting will receive a presentation by residents from the Beacon Heath area who formed the 'Mile Lane pod' to research and celebrate the mile long sunken path. The project was supported by Interwoven Productions CIC – specialists in creative placemaking.

Among the issues to be discussed will be the Lane's links with the Roman road network and St Katherine's Priory. Childhood memories and current community initiatives will be shared.

Hot drinks and mince pies will be served at the end of the meeting.

Wed 13th Mar 2024

Richard Ford's Alhambra Villa and Exeter's Lost Buildings in the 1800s – talk by Todd Gray.

Todd's latest book is currently being offered at £2 off at £20 plus P&P from <https://stevensbooks.co.uk/product/exeters-lost-buildings-destruction-1800-1899/>

Wed 12th Jun 2024

TBC

Wed 11th Sep 2024

AGM and talk TBC

Meeting the promise of 'Homes for Heroes' in Heavitree after the First World War – Dr Julia Neville

Was such a promise ever made?

Before the end of WWI, the Government started to plan what would happen when it was over. They were thinking about the logistics of demobilisation and the munitions industry. As early as 1916, work began.

The Ministry of Reconstruction was formed. It was led by Christopher Addison, and was charged with overseeing the task of rebuilding 'the national life on a better and more durable foundation.' It produced a series of booklets called "The Aims of Reconstruction".

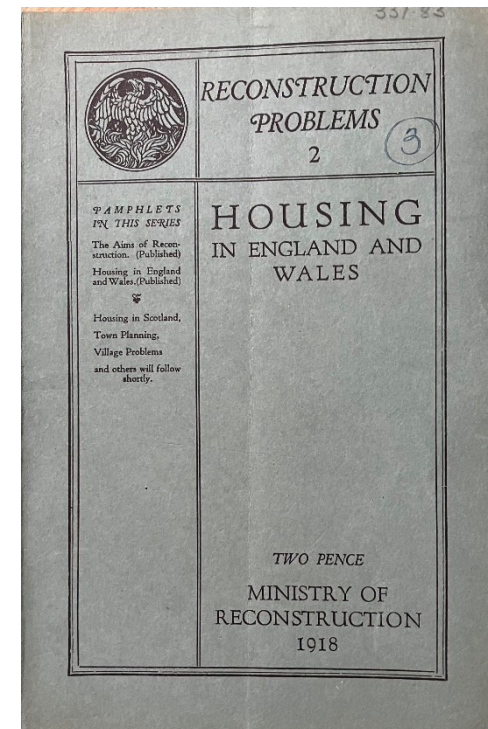
The Ministry had the idea that the country would pick up broken threads and go back to the social and industrial situation that existed at the outbreak of war.

There was, however, a different feeling in the air. People had begun to doubt whether the pre-war situation was worthy of being reconstructed. The immensity of the sacrifice of WWI created a demand for a better way of life. There was much to be ashamed of when looking back at the conditions of 1914, and now, at the end of the war, there was a desire to create a better world, to do justice to the living, and in reverence to the dead.

The problem of housing loomed. It was a large task:

1. There was a shortage of 300,000-400,000 houses in England and Wales;
2. There were lots of defective and unsanitary houses;
3. In many areas, including Heavitree, of course, there were crowded and narrow slum areas.

All of these problems had been exacerbated by the war. There had been no effort to build new houses or repair buildings. Building materials were consistently diverted by the war effort. The problem was both rural and urban.



The Ministry asked local authorities to calculate the number of houses to be built in their area. There was an agreement in principle by the Cabinet to fund this.

Local authorities were seen as the primary agents in getting this done (a new role for councils); it was also a role for public utility services and private enterprises: everyone would work together to create a better world.

From Promise to Reality



There was a great need for housing, reinforced by a sense of debt owed to heroes. This commitment to public expenditure had to survive a general election. Now, post war, there was a new electorate which included men who had not been able to vote before, and also many women. Lloyd George was elected with an overwhelming victory; now was the time to turn ideas into reality. The task was to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in, and there was no time to lose. Within three months, local authorities were to assess the needs of their inhabitants, and decide how to meet them. The Government was to subsidise this, and to make provision where needed.

Exeter's Post-War Housing Scheme Statistics

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Number of houses completed at 31 March 1930, total | 652 |
| i. Parlour | 152 |
| ii. Non-parlour | 500 |
| Capital Expenditure | £341,303 |
| Revenue Expenditure | £6205 |
| Interest or Sinking Fund Loan Repayment, 1929-30 | £13,907 |
| Income (excluding Rate Contr. Or Subsidy, 1929-30) | £12,290 |
| Net weekly rents charged, excluding rates | |
| Parlour | 7s 9d – 10s |
| Non-parlour | 6s 1d to 7s 8d |

Municipal Year Book, 1931

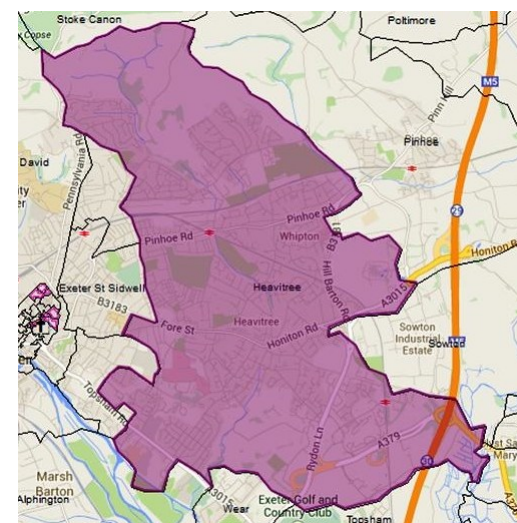
Exeter's local authority had quite an active committee, and immediately appointed people to plan for the future. Their first estimate was that they needed to build 300 houses in three years (they used data from the 1911 census). The housing commissioner said that this was insufficient. The number was revised to 1000 houses, and by October 1919 the authority was given a provisional agreement. The number of houses built never reached this figure as the subsidy was later reduced.

Parlour / non-parlour was a big topic of the time, and referred to whether you had a second room apart from the kitchen. Those against thought that it would be a waste, as the second room would just be kept for best, but those in favour said it would be a real benefit for families with children.

The Opportunities of Annexation

Exeter City Council had recently swallowed up Heavitree (1913), and so Heavitree was going to absorb many of the new schemes.

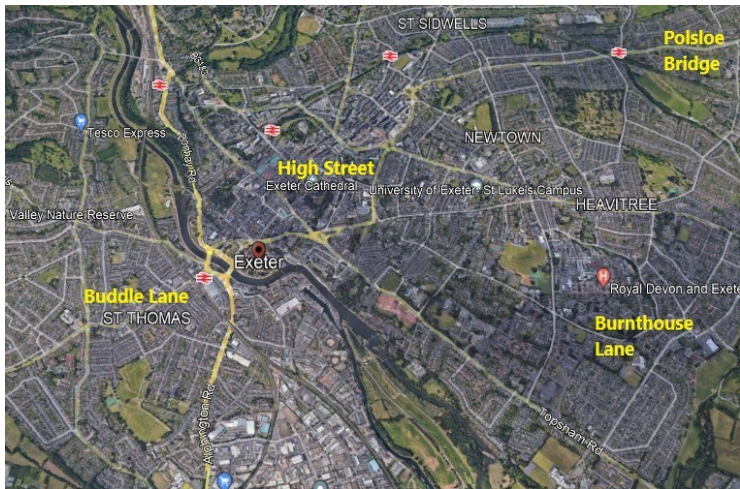
Heavitree was already popular for its location. It was easy to commute into



Exeter. Adverts in local papers constantly referred to houses being minutes from the nearest tram stop, whilst being amidst rural surroundings.



The New Estates:



The new housing needed to be on green-field sites, and Polsoe Bridge, Buddle Lane and Burnthouse Lane were chosen. They were all some distance from the High Street, and many complained about the sense

of isolation from the city centre: they were nicknamed Shanghai, Chinatown, and Siberia, respectively.

Polsoe Bridge Estate

30 acres of land was purchased, for 150 homes and the other half to be left as open space. The Ministry was concerned about standards, and the ratio of

open space to development was important. The 1919 manual talked about standards, layouts, etc. The Tudor Walters Report said that new houses should be two storeyed cottages, in groups of four to six, with



medium to low pitched roofs, little exterior decoration and in cul-de-sacs. They wanted to avoid projections at the rear, which might impede sunlight and access.

These houses were to have three bedrooms, a bathroom (there was debate as to whether this should be up or downstairs), a cold-store, larder, kitchen / living room, and parlour (which shouldn't be the sunniest room).

The system gave priority to ex-servicemen, disabled servicemen and widows with children.

The Money Runs Out

| | 1921-2 ^a | 1922-3 | 1923-4 | 1924-5 | 1925-6 | 1926-7 |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Army | 95.1 | 45.4 | 43.6 | 44.8 | 44.3 | 43.6 |
| Navy | 80.8 | 56.2 | 52.6 | 55.6 | 59.7 | 57.6 |
| Air Force | 13.6 | 9.4 | 9.6 | 14.3 | 15.5 | 15.5 |
| Education | 53.7 | 47.4 | 46.3 | 46.6 | 47.1 | 48.4 |
| Health | 13.6 | 9.4 | 9.3 | 10.3 | 10.4 | 10.1 |
| Housing | 9.1 | 8.0 | 8.3 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 10.0 |
| Old-age pensions | 22.0 | 22.4 | 23.2 | 24.9 | 27.0 | 30.0 |
| War pensions | 95.8 | 80.6 | 72.6 | 69.9 | 67.3 | 63.6 |
| Total | 383.7 | 278.8 | 265.5 | 275.5 | 280.4 | 278.8 |
| COL Index ^b | 220 | 179 | 173 | 172 | 174 | 172 |

Departmental Expenditure Plans in £m

The country was soon in the grip of a recession, and Government expenditure increased. The national debt was £359.8 million. The Government had no choice but to agree on austerity. Everything was cut, including the housing programme. The pace changed; there were no longer generous subsidies from the Government, so councils had to do what they could afford. This lasted until 1923, when there was a change of Government and Neville Chamberlain took over as Minister of Health. He wasn't averse to the idea of municipalities taking on responsibilities. Any builder or organisation could put in a bid and get a grant to build houses. The Housing Act of 1924 supported this even further.

Clearing the Slum Areas



Exeter City Council had to designate slum areas. They had already started demolishing Paul Street, but the West Quarter had to be cleared and the occupants moved out. Rents proved too expensive, however. Residents had been paying 3/6 per week in the West Quarter, but the starting rent for a non-parlour newly built house was 6/1 a week. For most, finding this extra money was impossible. Houses continued to be condemned, but their occupants had nowhere to go. The situation came to a head in 1924, when Dr J S Steele Perkins, chair of the Public Health Committee, asked how the Council could contemplate spending extra money on buildings for



*Dr J.S. Steele-Perkins,
Public Health Committee Chair*

themselves when there were such slums in the West Quarter. This did advance things a bit, but didn't resolve the rents problem.

First Exeter Church Army houses, May 1927
An offshoot of the main Church Army organisation built houses in Rutherford Street, Wonford. The group could build more cheaply than the Council as they were subject to fewer regulations. The group particularly wanted to build housing for larger families who earned less than £3 a week. By the end of the 1920s they had built 18 such houses: 14 in Rutherford Street, and 4 in the West Quarter.





Rutherford Street Church Army Houses

Another Crusader? – Dr Charles Newton Lovely



Dr Lovely was a GP appalled at the conditions of the West Quarter. He really wanted to tackle the problem quickly, and was more entrepreneurial than Church Army Housing. He was a very dynamic person, and would target groups as such Mothers' Unions, or go door to door. He founded the Exeter Workmans' Dwellings Company.

The EWD built the Polsloe Bridge Estate. It was slightly less 'frilly' – the houses were very plain (the ones in the picture had been upgraded). By the end of 1929 they had provided 79 houses. We can see the difference that his dynamism made. This attracted national congratulation, and Exeter was considered to be leading in the field of voluntary societies.

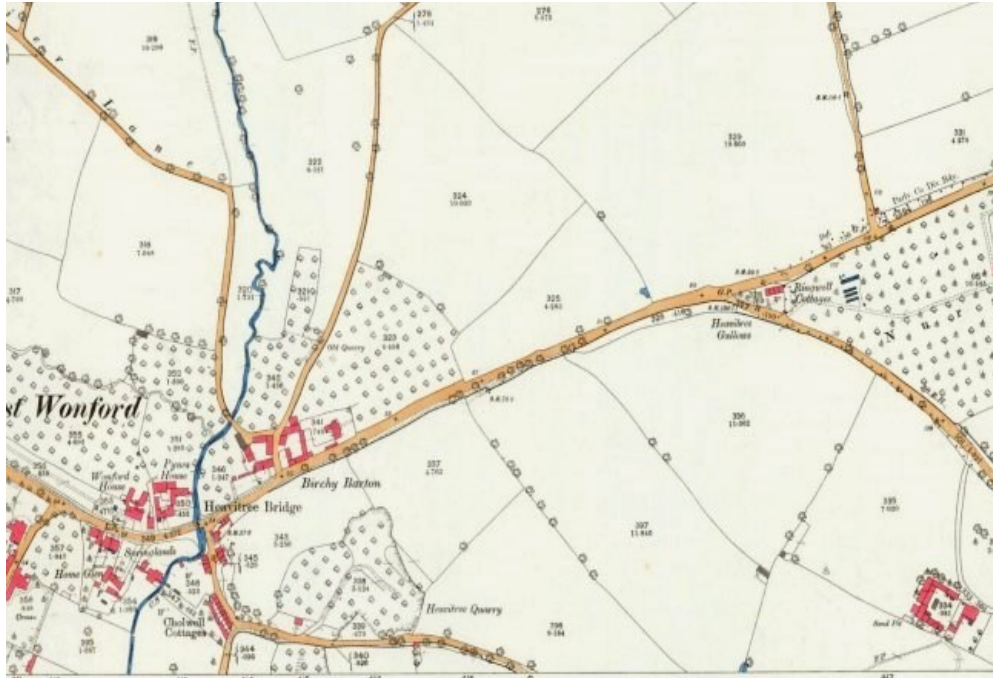


From Renting to Owning

During the 20th century, house ownership changed significantly. In 1918, 77% of houses were rented. By 1939 this had fallen to 38%. This vast rise in private ownership was facilitated by more ready availability of money. In 1923, private builders could apply for a grant from the Government. Houses like Julia's grandparents' at First Avenue were built (it cost £600 in 1927). The houses had new-fangled features like light switches, and cost-reducing modifications like a lower ceiling height and a combined bathroom and lavatory. Private builders didn't need to adhere to Government regulation.



Birchy Barton Estate



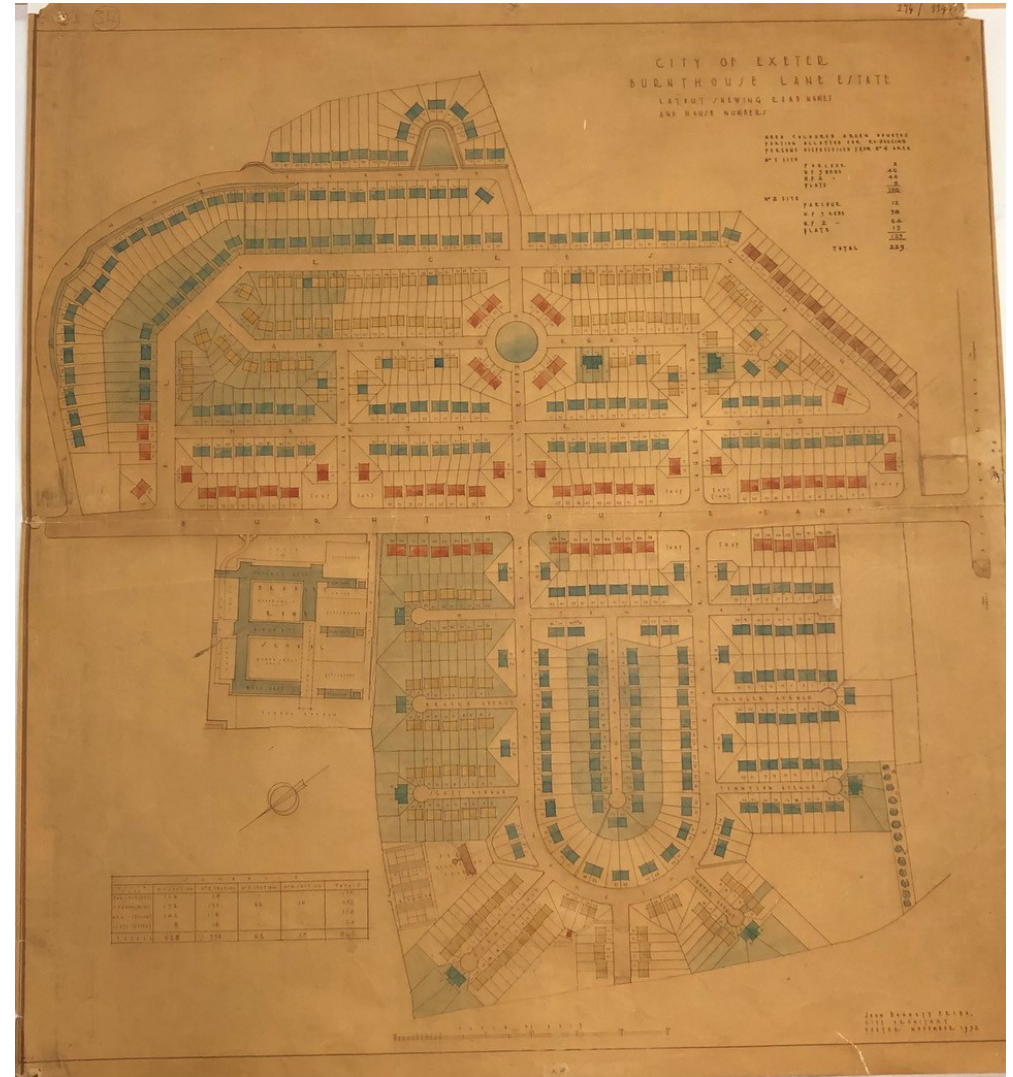
At this time there were many sales of landed estates.

In this instance, Lord Poltimore sold the land in 14 different lots:

- Mr G Lee bought the farmhouse
- The Wonford Allotment Holders Association bought Barn Close
- Mr C Warren of Exeter bought the Garden Plot, Footsfield Plot and the Gallows Field
- Mr S Chard of Heavitree purchased Footsfield and Lower North Park
- Mr J W Seward of Exeter bought Higher North Park
- Messrs Drake, Harris, Vincent, and Ardern secured the arable land



Mr Warren, a City councillor and estate agent, proposed creation of a garden suburb at Birchy Barton. He dreamt of 150 semi-detached residences with room for tennis courts and vegetable gardens.



Burnthouse Lane

The West Quarter was being cleared. Preston Street School classes were becoming progressively smaller as increasing numbers of people moved to Burnthouse Lane. The busiest phase of moving was in the 1930s. The Government had changed its policy to subsidise rents for West Quarter people.

Burnthouse Lane had been a small, country lane, but in 1927 the City made a compulsory purchase of 38 acres. It was resolved to be Exeter's third large

development of social housing, and would be Exeter's very own garden-city with wide roads, churches, trees, and gardens. City architect John Bennett chose a simple, classic style for the houses.

All did not go smoothly at first, as much of the infrastructure was unfinished. People held a protest meeting, demanding a reduction in rent of at least 2s a week, with free conveyance to school for children, alterations and additions to the bus service, fences, roads and footpaths, lamps fixed to lamp posts, and proper dustbins supplied.



AGM

In the past year, we have had three talks and two walks, all of which have been very well attended. Terry thanked the officers for their hard work. All officers were re-elected.

The finances are looking healthy. We have 50 members: we lost five but gained another five.

We are looking to change our website host, as service from the one we have been with for the past 10 years has deteriorated markedly over 2 to 3 years. Costs are higher now everywhere; the annual cost of hosting our website is likely to increase by around £50. This should be well worth it, as our website is very well used.

Autumn Cemetery Walk



A beautiful afternoon on 22nd October greeted members and friends for our annual autumn walk. The location was the Higher Cemetery with a tour expertly led by Michael Parrott, Chair of the Friends of Higher Cemetery.



Michael started the walk by the World War One memorial. We were shocked to hear that women casualties were not allowed to be included. Next stop was the grave of William Pett who became the superintendent of the new Exeter City Fire Brigade, aged just 21. The Brigade was set up after the Theatre Royal fire of 1877.

We moved on to the grave of a Thomas Snow Moore and wondered what the significance was. Well, he opened a shop in Fore Street in the early

20th Century and it is now one of the best-known stores in the City – Thomas Moore.



Michael very kindly picked out a series of graves with Heavitree connections. For example, we were shown the resting place of John James Fry Ellis, the prolific local house builder. Ellis was subject of Sally Robinson's booklet 'Expanding Exeter: The story of Regent Square & John James Fry Ellis' published by our Society.

We walked on to see the Theatre Fire memorial sculpted by Harry Hems and then nearby the grave of Fred Holman, who won the men's 200 metre Olympic breast-stroke gold medal at the 1908 games at White City Stadium.

Continuing the sporting theme we stopped at the gravestone of Percy Fender. A Test cricketer, he hit the fastest recorded first class century in 1920 – taking just 35 minutes. His memorial states 'a record innings'. Don Bradman watched his first match in Australia.



Moving on, we arrived at the World War Two area of the Cemetery and were shown graves of servicemen from Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Southern Rhodesia and Poland as well as Germany and an Italian. From here it was short walk to the civilian Exeter Blitz graves. Here we learnt about Francis Ross an actor and theatre manager who had given Charlie Chaplin one of his earliest stage parts. In 1940 Francis joined the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA). He was on tour in Exeter when killed at 2 Mowbray Avenue on 4th May 1942.



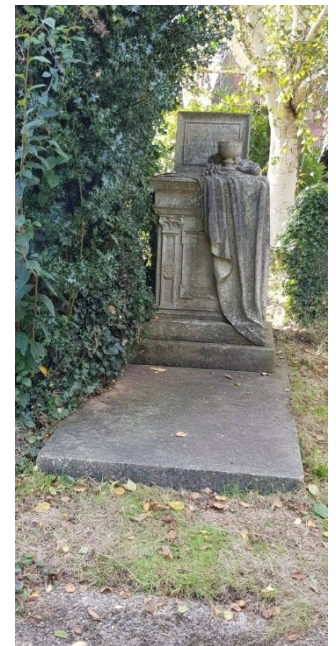
Next, we saw the memorial to a sculptor with strong Heavitree connections. Edward Thomas Rogers had a workshop where the Pyramids swimming baths were later sited. Rogers worked on the new tower at St Michael's Church; so, his sculpting can be seen every day!

Keeping with sculpting we were shown the grave of Harry Hems, the notable craftsman who came to Exeter to work on the Royal Albert Memorial Museum and set up workshops in Longbrook Street. 'Harry's Restaurant' now sits in part of the workshop complex.

Our next grave of interest was the stunning memorial to Edward Ladell a successful still-life artist who focussed on paintings of fruit, flowers and glass vessels. He died in 1886. His gravestone is full of sculptures with artistic references.

Does anyone know who the first person to be buried in the Cemetery was? Those on the tour do!

We were taken to the grave of Edward Leach Herbert. A landlord of the



Valiant Soldier pub he was the first to be interred shortly after the Cemetery opened in 1866.

Our final grave was that of George Stoker; one of the World War One graves. George had a fascinating medical career including the discovery that oxygen helped heal wounds, but he also contributed to world culture by informing and inspiring his brother Bram Stoker to write 'Dracula'.



While at the top end of the Cemetery we were told about the Lodge House at the entrance. The Lodge Keeper lived upstairs, and the offices were downstairs. Originally only married couples were allowed to have the job. It is now privately owned.

Towering above the Cemetery in this area is a giant monkey puzzle tree. It comes from Chile and was brought to the site by the Veitch family who had the contract to lay out the newly established grounds.

Many, many thanks to Michael Parrott for such an illuminating tour. It was supposed to last an hour, but such was the level of interest and questions that it took two.

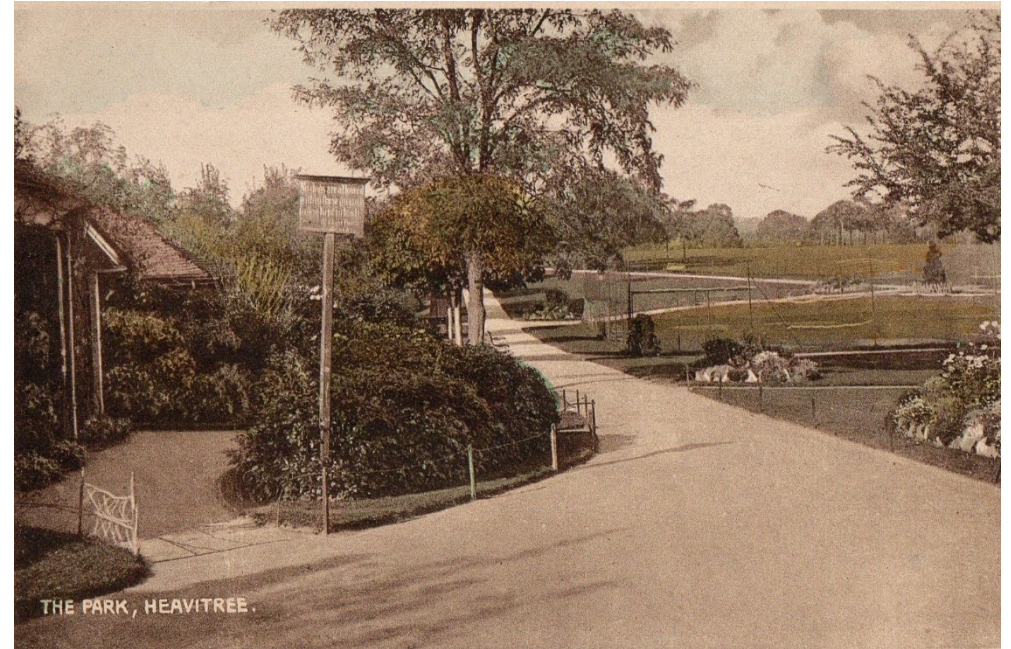
For more information on the Friends of Higher Cemetery see: <https://sites.google.com/site/friendsofhighercemetery/home>

Martin Weiler



Old Postcards of Heavitree Pleasure Ground

Thank you to Ian Jubb, for sending us some wonderful copies of old Heavitree Pleasure Ground postcards from his personal collection. Some of these we have never seen before. I like seeing the man asleep on the bench in the second postcard!





The 'Panny'

At a recent Heritage Week event held at the Mint by the Romany and Traveller Family History Society, Mike was interested to see on one of their information boards that their word for river is 'pani', which is a name used in India. In the past, Romany families may well have camped beside the Northbrook and used the name. It would be interesting to know if the name was used before Indian troops were stationed in the area.



This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society

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