

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 Mar 2024

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

Todd's latest book is currently available for £22 (plus P&P) from <https://stevensbooks.co.uk/product/exeters-lost-buildings-destruction-1800-1899/>

Wed 12th Jun 2024

Clare Maudling: Post war rebuilding and housing development in Heavitree.

(Clare is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Exeter. She has agreed to focus on Heavitree).

Sun 14th Jul 2024

Heavitree Parish Boundary walk

Meet 9am by the boundary stone at the corner of Polsloe Road (Livery Dole junction).

There will be opportunities to walk the whole 14 mile route or to complete sections of choice.

Wed 11th Sep 2024

John Salvatore: Roman Exeter (with focus on Heavitree) + AGM

Our previous meeting:

Mile Lane, Beacon Heath: a hidden Heavitree treasure



Nick Roseveare is a resident of Mile Lane, and part of the 'Mile Lane Pod'. He took us on a visual and verbal stroll down the Lane.

Nick moved to Mile Lane in 1994. His mother was appalled; he should've been moving to St Leonards! Nick has never regretted it, and has been there thirty years now. He sees Mile Lane as a hidden treasure.

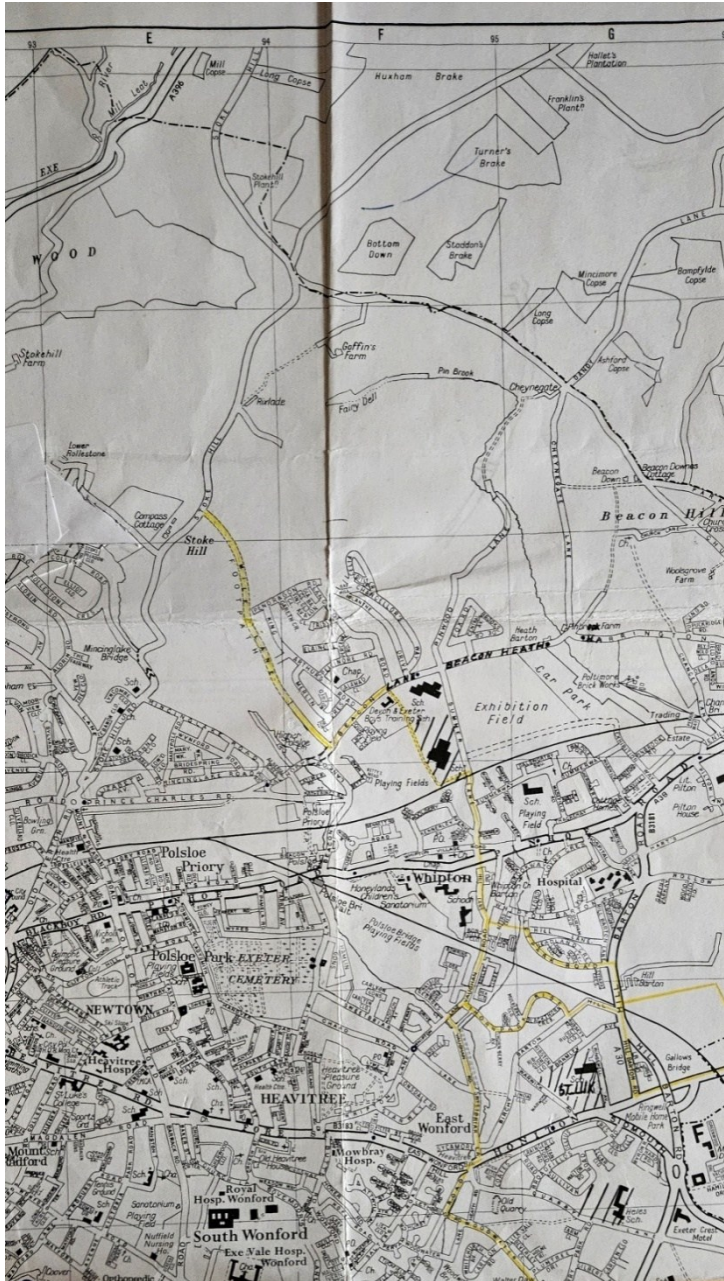


The picture to the left shows the Lane around ten years ago. The road is lumpy and bumpy, and was like that when Nick moved in. One year the Council came and sprayed paint around all the potholes. Over the winter the rain washed all the paint away, and nothing changed. Eurobell needed to dig a trench in the road to lay

a cable, and then resurfaced that strip, leaving a 2ft wide tarmacked section in the middle. Every cyclist always went up and down that bit. The Lane was finally resurfaced in 2017.

Where is Mile Lane and why is it of interest?

The map below is oriented north-south, and shows how Mile Lane was in the old parish boundary. If you walk up the Lane to Stoke Road, you're in the uppermost point of the boundary. The yellow represents the water courses, heading towards the Northbrook etc, which warrant further exploration.



Earlier maps show Mile Lane with just the initial strip of houses constructed alongside. The 1927 map shows that most of these had been built. Builders started at the bottom and worked their way up.

When the Beacon Heath Estate was built, the initial strip of houses was separated from the Estate by the hedgerows and trees of Mile Lane; this can clearly be seen on maps of the time. Residents still lead very separate lives, which is why the Squilometre work is good: it has brought the sides together. Nick has learnt more about the Estate in the past



1934

year than he has over the previous 29. Nick is not sure of the provenance of the 1950s aerial photo below. It shows the Estate, which was completed in 1953. All of this area is now built upon. One resident of the Lane was so appalled by the new Estate and ruination of the view, that she moved out of the Lane.

In the picture you can see the old quarry. It was a feeder for West Brick in Monks Road. Most knew it as 'The Dump'. In the past, there were uninterrupted views across cornfields to St Marks Church in Pinhoe. There must have been fabulous freedom to roam. Nick loves Mile Lane so much that he wants to see its preservation, and make sure future generations can also enjoy it.



1950s

Early memories of Mile Lane:



The photo above shows Nick's daughter in 2000, aged 8 or 9. You can see there was just grass growing. Now there are trees and shrubs, and paths by the dozen, for dog walkers, etc.

Kev Pearson shared his memories of growing up by Mile Lane, which he described as his 'playground'. He couldn't wait to finish school and get out to The Panny. He showed a photo of where the quarry used to extend. There was a cliff and then it stopped being the quarry and became a landfill site. This was great fun for children. Some of the stuff that was buried there was not very nice and is still being monitored by The Environment Agency.

Mile Lane was a cut through from Beacon Heath into 'The Dump' and The Panny. It was pitted and rutted. The wildlife was amazing. You could scoop buckets into ponds – there were newts, grass snakes, adders, and rats.

Lots of old Exeter Brewery bottles got dug up on the banks of the Panny. It was an early landfill site - maybe as early as the 1950s. It's a valley, so there were other streams too. Some of these are now culverted; you can follow the manholes in a straight line along the culverts. There were rope swings and it was a playground - they didn't want the new estates to be built.

There were holes in the hedge all along Mile Lane, and you could get through to the Valley Park. The holes still exist, but now they lead to built-up estates. Kev can remember 6ft deep snowdrifts in Mile Lane and would love to see that now.

A walk along Mile Lane:

The bridleway marks the end of the built-up area of Mile Lane itself. Here is a turning circle ('the saucepan'). Nick remembers six or seven old bangers driving up through the Lane, determined to drive up the bridleway. There was an argument, and the police were called. They used the excuse, 'if you

don't drive up a bridleway once every twenty years, it won't stay a bridleway.'



In 2006 residents saw a fire engine drive up Mile Lane. They said they were just seeing if they could get up there if there was a fire. It was very tight, and the engine got really scraped; it hasn't been seen since. Since then, a wooden post has tended to keep out cars.



The bottom part of the bridleway is quite narrow and rutted and boggy. There is some debris that has spilled from one of the houses that it would be good to see cleaned up.

It slowly begins to widen out. The picture below is from before the Pendragon turning. You can see bricks in the base of the path, but they're not sure why they are there.



As you walk further up, the surface gets better, the Lane widens, and you become more enclosed. On your left is the whole of Mile Lane Path. On the right some access has been closed off.



You eventually approach another wooden post. As Nick walks up here, he just prays that there hasn't been another pile of rubbish fly-tipped at the top. At times rubbish has been dumped there and it has been left for weeks.

The view at the top looks westwards towards Dartmoor, and is a fantastic reward after 15-20 minutes of exercise.



The photo below, from 2003, shows the start, on the left, of the red brick houses of Upland Drive. It was a hot dry summer. Now that view is different: there are bushes and shrubs.



Why Mile Lane?

We are not sure why it is named 'mile' – the Pod can't find any records. There is a theory that when Mincinglake Valley Park was dammed, Mill Field, which was about half way up, could have given the name to the Lane.

The distance from St Katherine's Priory to the top of Mile Lane, if you ignore the houses and take the direct route, is almost exactly a mile. This could be significant.

Stoke Hill Road was probably a Roman road (Haldon Hill > Exeter > Stoke Hill Road > Stoke Canon and beyond) so may be this was a side road coming off it. It could date from then.

Nobody is sure about rights of way, and there's no formal record. People come and go; horse riders and cyclists use it; Kev learnt to ride a motorbike there. Residents are worried about development in Mile Lane Park or at the end of Pendragon Road. Will it remain a wooden path or be turned into something like a cycleway?

Mile Lane Pod: celebrating Mile Lane

JoJo Spinks set this up as part of the Beacon Heath Squilometre. For Nick, the historic nature of the area makes it important to preserve the Lane, and to get the community to recognise and enjoy it.



The Pod was set up in 2022 and has gone from strength to strength. It has created friendship and hope, and the good work will continue.

They have organised many events, which they've promoted via Facebook and posters. They've also tried approaching leaders of the community for support. For example, Morrisons donated some pumpkins and sweets for their Halloween event.



Kev started walking the Lane during Lockdown when we were only allowed one hour of exercise. He then started offering guided walks, which became very popular. When they bought pumpkins, the lady on the till asked,

'Where's Mile Lane?'. It is therefore vitally important to make it accessible to locals. There's talk of doing the walks seasonally, although autumn is usually best. Kevin enjoyed hearing all the conversations between strangers.





Children's events often pull in the adults. For many local children, they were walking the Lane for the first time. A Spooky Stroll and an Easter Egg Hunt were organised to tempt people to discover what was on their doorstep. One lady described the hill as 'as steep as Everest!' They also held craft workshops, which were very popular. There is a big local demand for the events, and, although it takes commitment from volunteers, it is worth it when people enjoy themselves

and the area. There is still not much uptake from non-white residents or teenagers, and they are wondering how they can reach out to these groups.

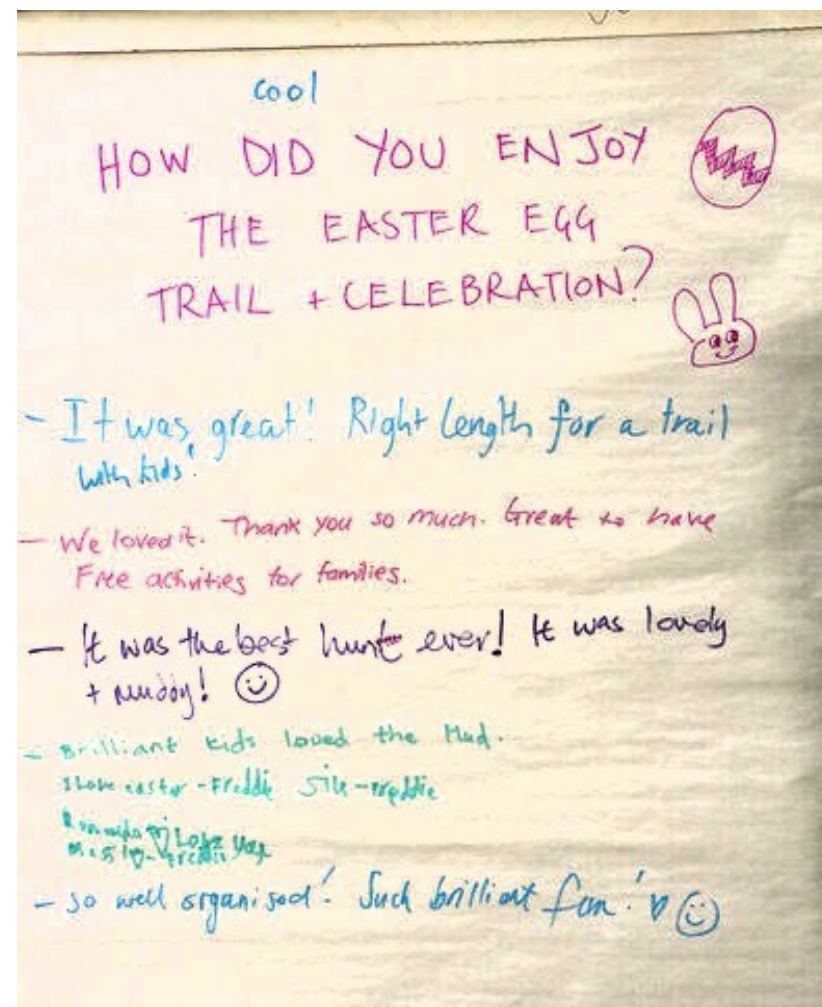
They also looked at how more wild planting could take place on the Beacon Heath Estate and on the Lane itself. They started with a community wildlife patch, and have been approached by the Devon Wildlife Trust to see what they can do in partnership.



The Pod is keen to keep going in the future. Their plans are:

- Build on what they have done. More walks!
- Link to other community events and those who organise them
- Information Boards/Booklets? (and collaborating with HLHS and other groups on a Northbrook Booklet)
- New Pods, e.g. 'Panni Pod'?

- New ideas, e.g. drones?
- Looking at ways to include those sections of the community they have yet to meet



Just some of the positive feedback from the local community

Update on Northbrook research:

Mike and Martin attended the meeting convened to discuss a potential project or projects on the Northbrook. A very encouraging 12 people turned up, with other apologies. A wide range of interests was covered, but there was agreement that we should work together on a potential Northbrook project or projects.

At this stage no decisions were made. One outcome could be that individual organisations would continue with their own specific projects but that they would coordinate on what they were up to, to avoid duplication, and to learn from others.

From our point of view, we emphasised our wish to produce a booklet or booklets with maps, some history, memories, geography, and maybe suggested walks. There is no reason why we shouldn't develop this further and incorporate things we learn from the other groups. Whether we then go ahead and publish on our own or as a Project as a whole, is a decision for the future.

Nick Roseveare, from the Mile End Pod, who spoke at our December meeting, has volunteered to do some more research into available maps of the river system. The Devon Wildlife Trust thought there was a good Northbrook Catchment description; they will try to locate this and share it. Both these aspects will be useful for a booklet.

Memories of Heavitree: Michael Hughes (90 years of age)

Michael Hughes was born in Mowbray Maternity Hospital, Heavitree on 1st May 1933. He was brought up in Goldsmith Street, and later moved to Alpha Street in the 1950s. Now living on Beacon Heath, Michael talked to Martin Weiler about his memories of Heavitree.

Exeter blitz

Michael's main earliest memories surround the blitz in Exeter during World War Two. "At first, we all had to sit under the stairs when the air raid warnings sounded. Later we had a Morrison shelter set up inside our house. When the sirens went off during the day, I had to take two boys home from Ladysmith School as they lived further away. We also shared the shelter with a neighbour. I didn't look forward to the air raids, but I did to the stew the neighbour brought in. It was full of Heinz baked beans. It was frightening when bombs were dropping but afterwards you wanted to know what had



happened. One dropped on the roof of the school, and I remember saying to my Mum, "Good, I won't have to go to school in the morning". There was an air raid shelter in front of the Bramdean School playing fields. We would walk from Heavitree to the Odeon cinema on Saturday mornings. It was totally flattened around there; we used to climb over the bricks. When you looked across from the top of Paris Street, there was only the Cathedral standing. One time we went out to near Exeter Airport and saw a German plane that had been shot down. There was a boy at school who was killed by a mine off St Loye's Road. Then it really hit you what was happening".

Home life

Michael's Mum, Frances Dorothy nee Hooper, was a Heavitree lass and had been brought up in the same house at 35 Goldsmith Street; also referred to as Lower Goldsmith Street in street directories. His Dad, Alfred, was a plumber from St Thomas. The directories describe his business as 'Plumber and Hot water Engineer'. Michael recalls that "it was lovely in Goldsmith Street as everyone knew each other. Even when we moved to Alpha Street,

a much longer road, it was so friendly, you would know everyone. No one had a car so you could play in the street.

We used to play football in Hanover Road and only had to stop when the Crossmead bus came along". Meals were simple – Cornflakes for breakfast, a snack at lunchtime and then an evening meal. "My favourite was homemade steak and kidney pudding".

On Saturday evenings it was fish and chips from Prance's on Fore Street. Michael remembers the family wireless. "It was the only thing we had for entertainment. It was large with a big battery and accumulator. I had to go to Thorn's hardware shop to get the accumulator charged up. You had to do that every two or three weeks". Sometimes for a treat we would go to Exmouth on the train from Polsloe Bridge. When I was older, I would go dancing at The Regal there. I saw many a punch up between boys from Exeter and trainees at the Lymstone camp".



Education

Michael started at Ladysmith Infants School when he was 5. He used to be delivered there by a local teenage girl as his Mum was busy in the mornings. It was in the grounds of the Infant's School that Victory in Japan (VJ) was celebrated with a large tea party, of which Michael still has some wonderful photos. His younger sister, Pauline, is there with Michael, as well as Dick

Manley, later an England rugby player. He was at School with Frank Potter (Heavitree Local History Society Member), and says Frank was always top in exams. Michael progressed through the Junior and Senior Schools before



attending Technical School in the World War Two huts in Belmont Park. "I studied woodwork and metalwork. A few of us used to walk there, often stopping at Yandell's shop on the corner of Hanover Road. We would buy a single cigarette each which cost a penny. We would then walk up Sampson's Lane and smoke them. One day a teacher caught us, but his only question was did we have a spare one for him!"

Heavitree Pleasure Gardens

"We had the best times of our lives in the Pleasure Gardens", says Michael. "After school we would play football there. I also remember climbing around a big pile of white rocks at the far entrance. It was probably dangerous. We used to watch the speedway at the County Ground, and were inspired to make our own track in the Gardens. The Park keeper caught us digging the ground up and played up hell with us. I remember during the war that trenches were built in the Pleasure Gardens as shelter if bombs came".



Football

Michael enjoyed playing football for his school and later for Heavitree United Reserves. He was a winger and could run fast. At the time Heavitree United's home ground was in the Pleasure Gardens. It was because of football that Michael was exempted from military service. "I was diagnosed with hammer toes. They said this was caused by wearing football boots that were too tight for me". Michael's next-door neighbour in Goldsmith Street, Lawrence Taylor, went on to play as a goalkeeper for Bristol Rovers. He also says that Exeter, Arsenal and England striker, Cliff Bastin (also a Ladysmith School pupil in earlier years), was "everyone's hero. After his career he came back to Heavitree and ran the Horse and Groom in Fore Street. My Dad used to drink in there and one day Bastin gave him a couple of tickets to go and watch Arsenal at Highbury". Michael was a keen Exeter City fan watching from the Cowshed at St James Park. "There was a lot of smoke, whistling and shouting in there".

Shops

Michael's family never had to go far for essentials. "There was a bakery where the newsagents are now on the corner of South Lawn Terrace. Jam donuts would be a special treat from there. We got our milk from Roseland's Dairy on Roseland Avenue. Our Vegetables came from Swanstons next to the Horse and Groom. Meat was obtained from Eastmans butchers, two up from

where the gun shop is now on Fore Street. Our newsagents were Partridges on Fore Street. Stuckey's was a corner shop in Shelton Place that sold alcohol. There were other more specialist businesses – there was a blacksmith up a lane between North Street and Homefield Road. As well as making horse shoes he would sharpen tools. We also sometimes helped ourselves. We used to go and scrump apples in Bastin's orchard near to where we lived".

Boys' Brigade

When he was 11, Michael joined the Boys' Brigade at the Congregational Church (now United Reformed). "Once a month we would march from the Pleasure Gardens to the church. I played the bugle to start with and won the award for best bugler in Exeter. I later changed to playing the drum. We used to march at the Heavitree Carnival and other local carnivals like St Thomas and Topsham. The drummers would be at the front. We even went to London once and played at the Royal Albert Hall. It was the first time I'd ever been to London and remember everyone rushing and tearing around. We went on the roof of St Paul's Cathedral and scratched our names there".

After Michael left Technical School, he joined his dad's plumbing business on Beacon Heath. He married Pauline in 1965 and they had two children, Sally and Barry. Barry, who had Cerebral Palsy, sadly died when he was 19.

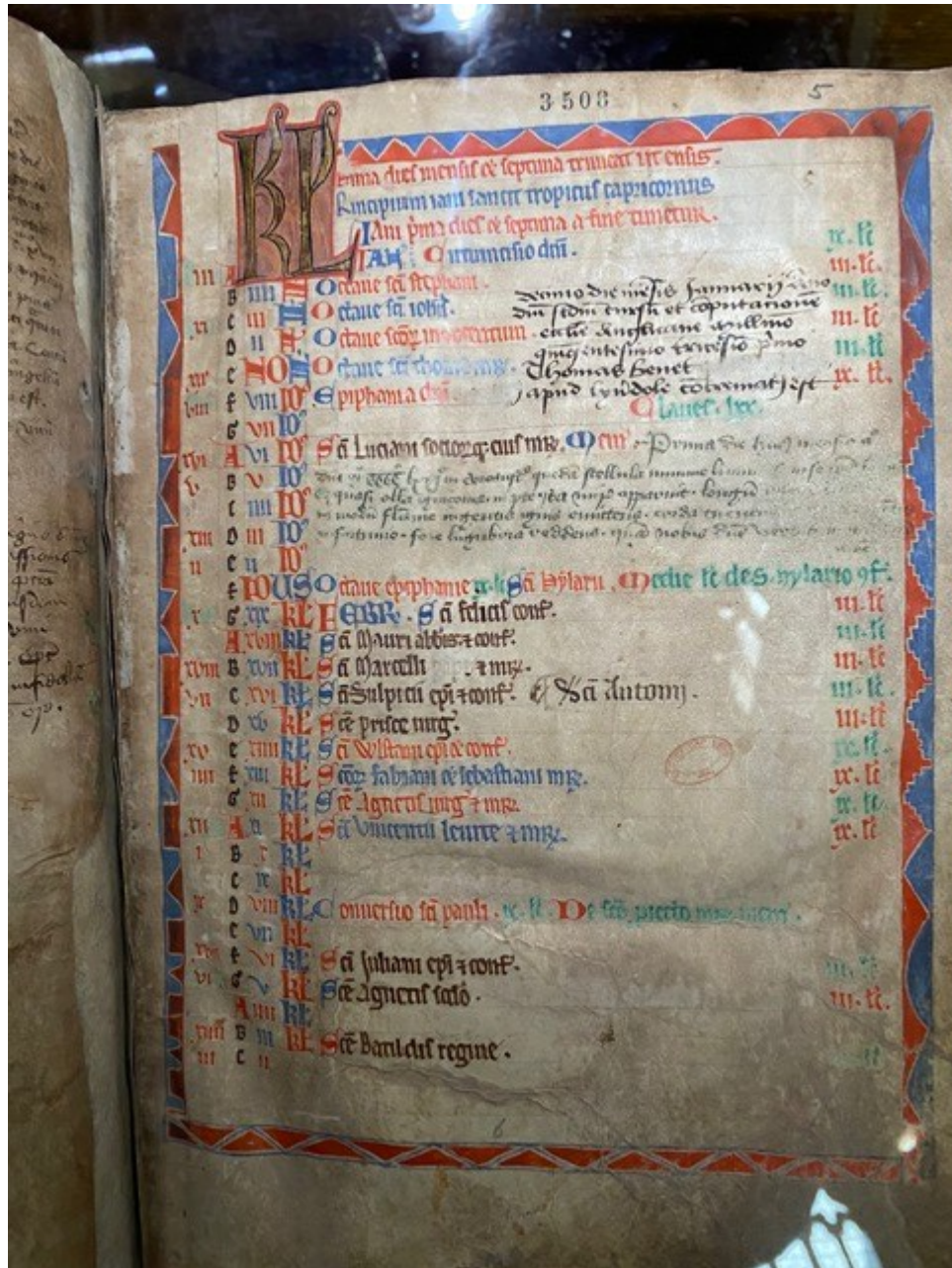
A big thank you to Michael for sharing all his memories. He still takes a great interest in Heavitree's past, and attended a Heavitree Local History Society talk at which the idea of this oral history conversation came about. We are also very grateful for the fabulous photos that Michael showed us of the VJ celebrations at Ladysmith School and his Technical School classmates. Wonderful local history!

Historic link with Heavitree execution

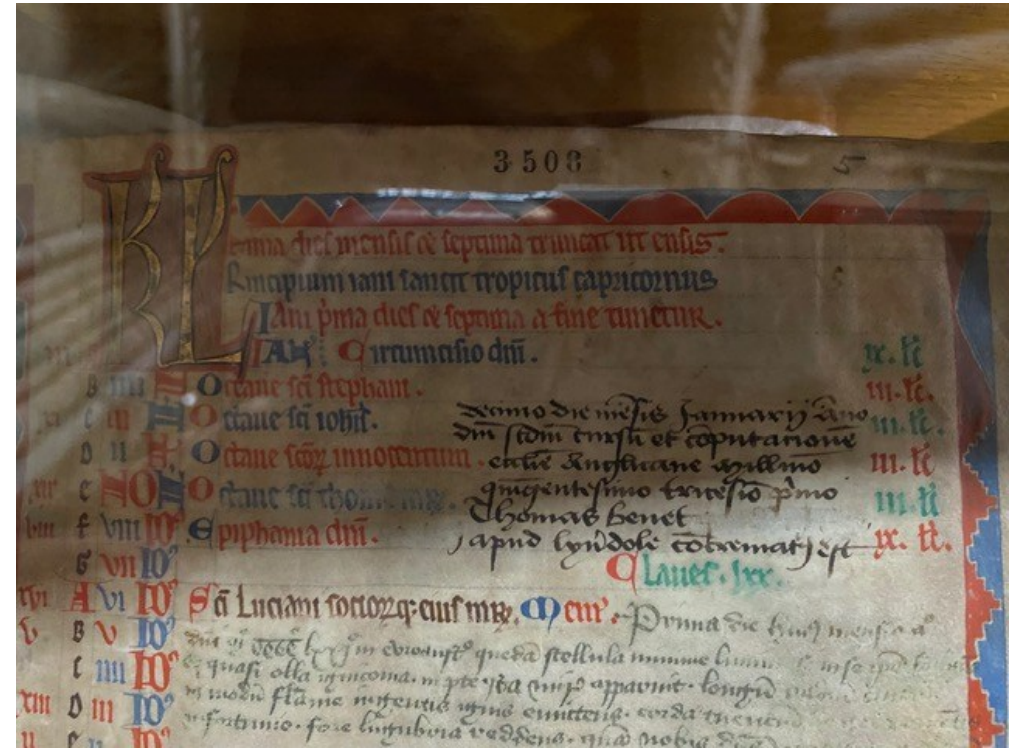
There was an interesting Heavitree link in an exhibition on 23rd January this year in Exeter Cathedral. The Cathedral's Library and Archives team displayed four fabulous books from their collection under the title 'Calendars and Chronicles in Focus'.

One of these books, a 13th century 'Kalendar', is usually known as the Worcester Psalter (Manuscript MS 3508). The page that was open to look at consisted of a list of saint's days to be observed. Most were in the original script written during the 1200s. There were some later additions; it is one of these that relates to Heavitree.

At some point, in black ink, the name of Thomas Benet had been added. Benet had been burned to death at Livery Dole in Heavitree on 15th January 1531 for denying the supremacy of the pope, including the posting of documents relating to this on, and near, Exeter Cathedral.



It was very unfortunate timing for Benet. Within months, Henry VIII had triggered the English Reformation, and the split with Rome followed. Exeter Cathedral became a Protestant seat of worship. Someone with access to the Worcester Psalter added Benet to the list of those to be remembered.



This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society

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