

**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 12<sup>th</sup> Jun 2024**

Clare Maudling:

‘Post-war rebuilding and housing development in Heavitree’

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

**Sun 14<sup>th</sup> Jul 2024**

Heavitree Parish Boundary walk.

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

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

**Wed 11<sup>th</sup> Sep 2024**

John Salvatore: Roman Exeter (with focus on Heavitree)

AGM

**Natural Northbrook: Restoring a City Stream**

Devon Wildlife Trust are currently working on Heavitree’s local stream to a more natural state. You can watch a recording of the meeting that several of our members attended here: [youtube.com/watch?v=NzDET9C-5Do](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzDET9C-5Do)

**Our Previous Meeting:**

**Richard Ford’s Alhambra Villa and Exeter’s Lost Buildings in the 1800s – Todd Gray**

Todd first had the idea for his most recent book when the Clarence Hotel burnt down seven and a half years ago. Hoskins had previously commented that: ‘Exeter lost more buildings to the City Council than to the Nazis’

More recently buildings had been lost to slum clearance and traffic control. Todd wanted to focus on the 1800s, period hadn’t yet been written about. Todd

wanted to find every scrap of evidence possible to understand how the buildings had changed over this period.

There are 9 Devon archives, well over 100,000 pieces of paper, all based on a Victorian catalogue. Many records are inaccessible as they never made it to a list (for example 15 volumes were discovered just last summer – Todd was the only one who has ever used them). In addition to this, there is online information, with many American and commonwealth countries holding information on Exeter. There are images too, in over 200 repositories (fine art museums, libraries and archives).

Todd asked himself why he is the only one who goes through these things. He realised it was to find things like this – a drawing of

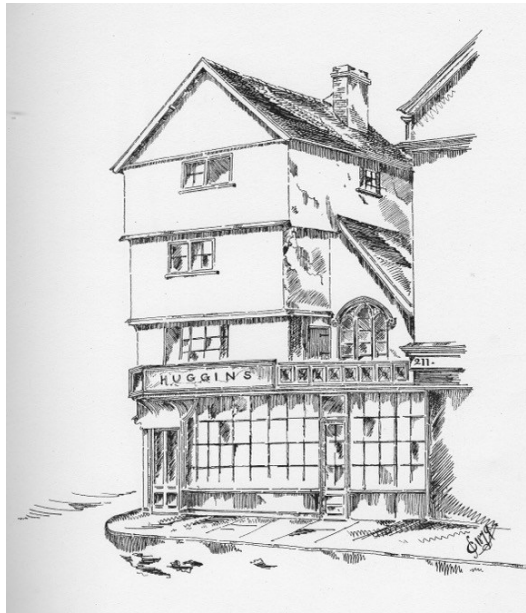




almshouses in the West Quarter that were pulled down and that we have no other images of.

Todd went to all seventeen places that hold topographical images of Exeter. Most have no catalogue at all. At Plymouth, it was a case of just opening drawer after drawer. Even the RAMM didn't

know what they had. Topographical drawings are very good for comparisons. For example, this is Goldsmith Street, near where White Stuff is today. In 1885 the shop on the corner was owned by Mr Huggins. It was built in 1615 and had 65 panes of glass. It was a very narrow shop, and the Victorians said that the owner watched when the larger ladies came into the shop in case they knocked things over. It was pulled down to widen Goldsmith Street.



Auctioneers' listings were also valuable. For example, the following picture of Mol's Coffee House and St Martin's Church; it's not technically 'right' but interesting all the same.



The picture below is from America, and shows Exeter from St Leonard's in the 1800s. Todd also showed us pictures of St Thomas from the Exe, a French-owned picture of the Guildhall, a picture of Southgate Street that was under someone's

desk, King Athelstan's Palace, and a picture from Australia drawn by an immigrant of the school that he went to in Exeter. None of these images had been seen before as they are in far away archives.



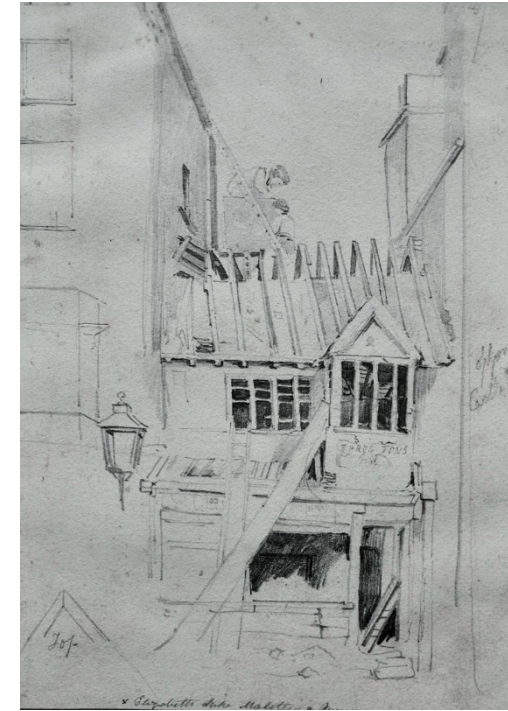
In the British Library he discovered three drawings of the West Gate – they are the only reliable views of it, as all the ones we had seen thus far were drawn after it came down.



There were many reasons why buildings changed or disappeared between 1800 and 1899, mainly: commercial development; fire (most commonly in Fore Street, North Street and a little in South Street; Fore Street had 4-5 fires, one after another); and fashion (in the early 1800s, they didn't like the gabled pitched roofs and timberwork like we see in Exeter's Laura Ashley building. They favoured flat, plain white stucco. By the 1830s, the fashion began shifting back to embellishment and what they had before. In Exeter at least 100 stucco buildings were later lost, that were actually medieval behind).



John Gendall and George Townsend were two Exeter boys who did more for the city than most others. Gendall worked at Mol's and lived at the deanery. They did what nobody else did – they drew buildings. Gendall drew them before, or even while, they were being demolished – as if he were thinking of us. We have hundreds of these images.



There are many more images at the Devon Heritage Centre, but they threw out all the information linked to them, so a lot of the details about who did them, where they are, etc, is now lost. Todd went through them all.

In 1833, the Improvement Commission was reformed to deal with the Cholera outbreak. This was the reform decade: they set about initiating 33 actions to remodel the city – particularly dealing with projections and street widening. They cut back overhanging buildings to give a new front. Steps and stairs went. There was even talk of removing the Guildhall's projection.

They described the dismal conditions in the slums as 'human ratholes swarming with life at every cranny'. Indeed, in some of these buildings, people lived with 4,5,6 or 7 in one room, or one room partitioned into two. The once wealthy mansions of merchants (who had moved out to villas in St Davids or Heavitree) were divided up and rented out by the room, described as having stinking water in the living room, narrow landings and staircases, broken beds on the floor with nothing to cover them. The Council pulled down these buildings – nobody wanted to keep them at this time.



Meanwhile, every Dean of the Dean & Chapter between 1800 and 1899 was part of a programme to demolish historic buildings. They wanted Exeter Cathedral area to look like Salisbury – open and elegant. Exeter was a packed

little city, so they eventually demolished the 19 little houses, gates, the cloisters and the C16th almshouses between the buttresses, for no real reason other than that they were inconvenient. When the Council was rebuilding by the Cathedral, they found lots of bones buried underneath some of the buildings. They used them to fill pot holes and boasted that you could travel all the way to Heavitree with no bumps! (this came from a document Todd found in the Bodlean). Exeter people felt uncomfortable travelling on Heavitree Road as they were travelling on the bones of the dead, but it was actually a Heavitree man who came up with the idea.



In the 1830s, the pace of destruction in Exeter made people start to question what they were losing. The idea of salvage, and joining together to rescue valuable items, came about.

**The Heavitree connection:** King John's Tavern was once at the top of South Street, and Gendall drew it as it was being taken down. Seven carvings were built into the woodwork, and it had been said that they were in Heavitree House, owned by the famous writer, Richard Ford.



Todd went to see the family of Richard Ford, and they showed him their huge archive of papers. Ford was an eccentric, with an eye for salvaged items.

From Newsletter 66:

*'His fireplace was taken from a house pulled down in Rack Street (West Quarter) and the ornate staircase, gates and carved woodwork all came from King John's Tavern on South Street (which was being rebuilt). A font in the garden was possibly taken from the 1845 rebuild of parts of Heavitree Church (it is now back in the church!). Ford was an enthusiastic collector, and, with great gusto, filled his house with items from his travels. For example, his bathroom was tiled with original tiles that he had picked up off the floor of the Alhambra. Part of his bath was made from the original register chest at Exeter Cathedral and there were sculpted heads on a parapet, from Italy. He set about creating a Spanish environment in the grounds of his house, laying out rectangular gardens lined with cypress trees and featuring a Moorish*



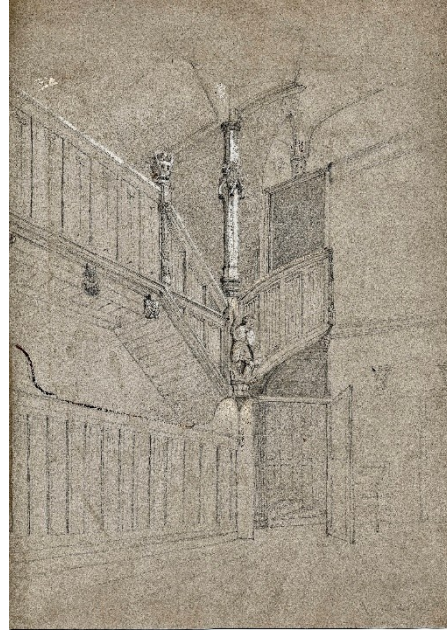
*tower/ gazebo building, in which he wore Spanish clothes and ate Spanish food.'*

Ford took painting lessons from John Gendall and wrote a lot of letters, embellished with politically incorrect jokes (especially about women) and little drawings.

When Ford died, his family kept the carving, but ended up selling them in the 1970s. The Metropolitan Museum of Art bought them (thinking they were from London), and they're the prize of the museum at the moment. Thousands of New Yorkers have seen them, but not people from Heavitree.



Bit by bit, Heavitree House was lost. The grounds were sold off and it was too big for its time. The Ford family moved to Stoke Hill and then to London. Their house is full of his papers and there's a whole room stuffed full of Heavitree History that would take weeks to go through and is sure to be full of fascinating information.



### Remembering Hilda Mitchelmore

Hilda was such a knowledgeable and interesting member of Heavitree Local History Society, and the Heavitree community in general. She had a hugely active role in the community and the Parish Church over the years, and always shared stories and memories with us at our meetings.

You can read about her memories of Christmas in Heavitree here:

[heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/newsletters/2016/hlhs-news-067-dec2016.pdf](http://heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/newsletters/2016/hlhs-news-067-dec2016.pdf),

and of working for the Devon and Somerset Stores, and the Blitz, here:

[heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/newsletters/2014/hlhs-news-059-dec2014.pdf](http://heavitreelocalhistorysociety.co.uk/newsletters/2014/hlhs-news-059-dec2014.pdf).

She also shared memories of the Blitz and Newcombe Street here:

[devonlive.com/news/devon-news/exeters-night-blitz-horror-changed-5078538](http://devonlive.com/news/devon-news/exeters-night-blitz-horror-changed-5078538)

If you have any memories of Hilda you would like to share, please let me know and I can include them in the newsletter.



Hilda fundraising at the Parish Church



*Hilda fundraising for a new Guide HQ in 1981*



### **Heavitree Pleasure Ground in the 1970s**

Thank-you to Mal Morrison for sharing the following photos of the Pleasure Ground. What changes can you spot over the past 50 or so years?





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