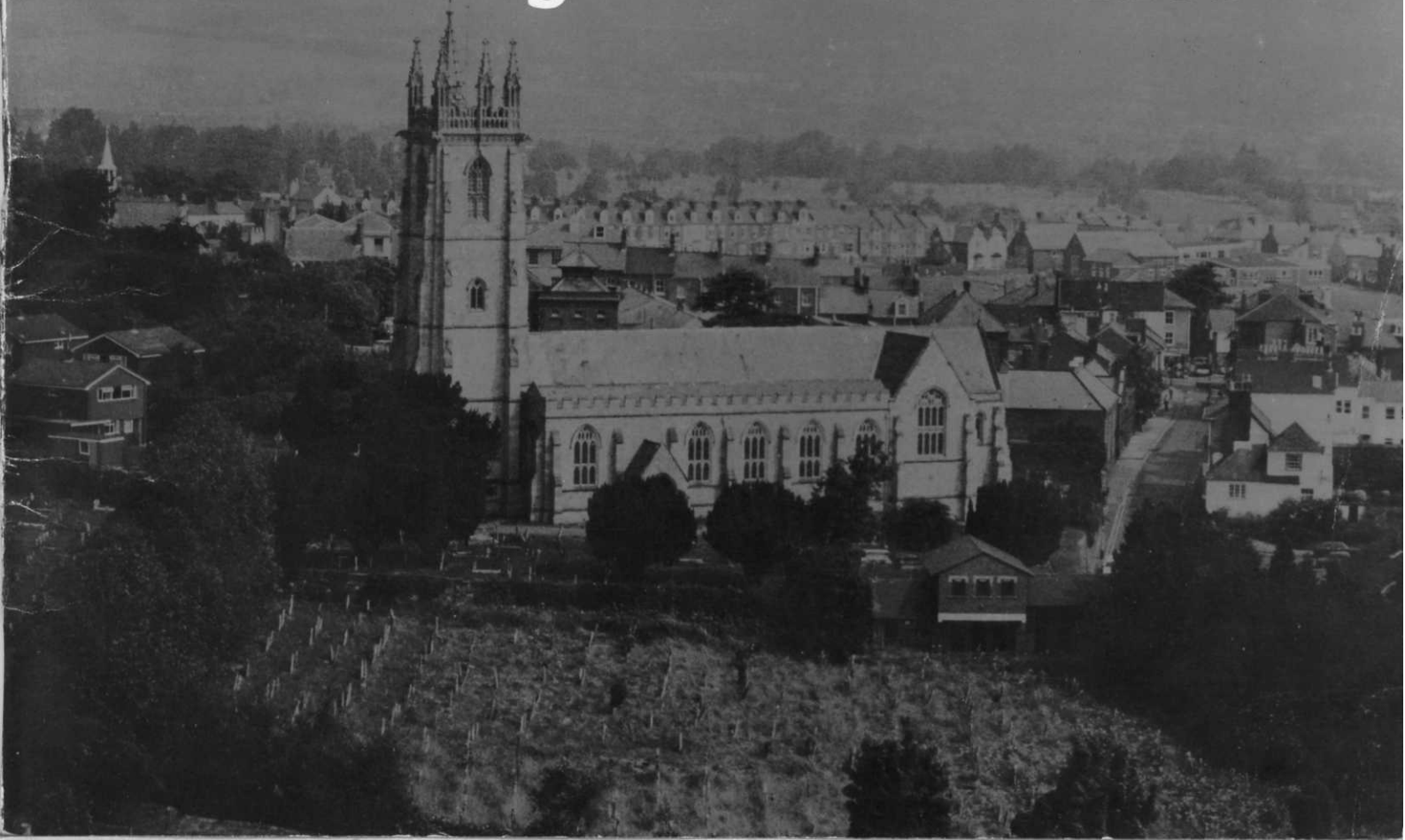
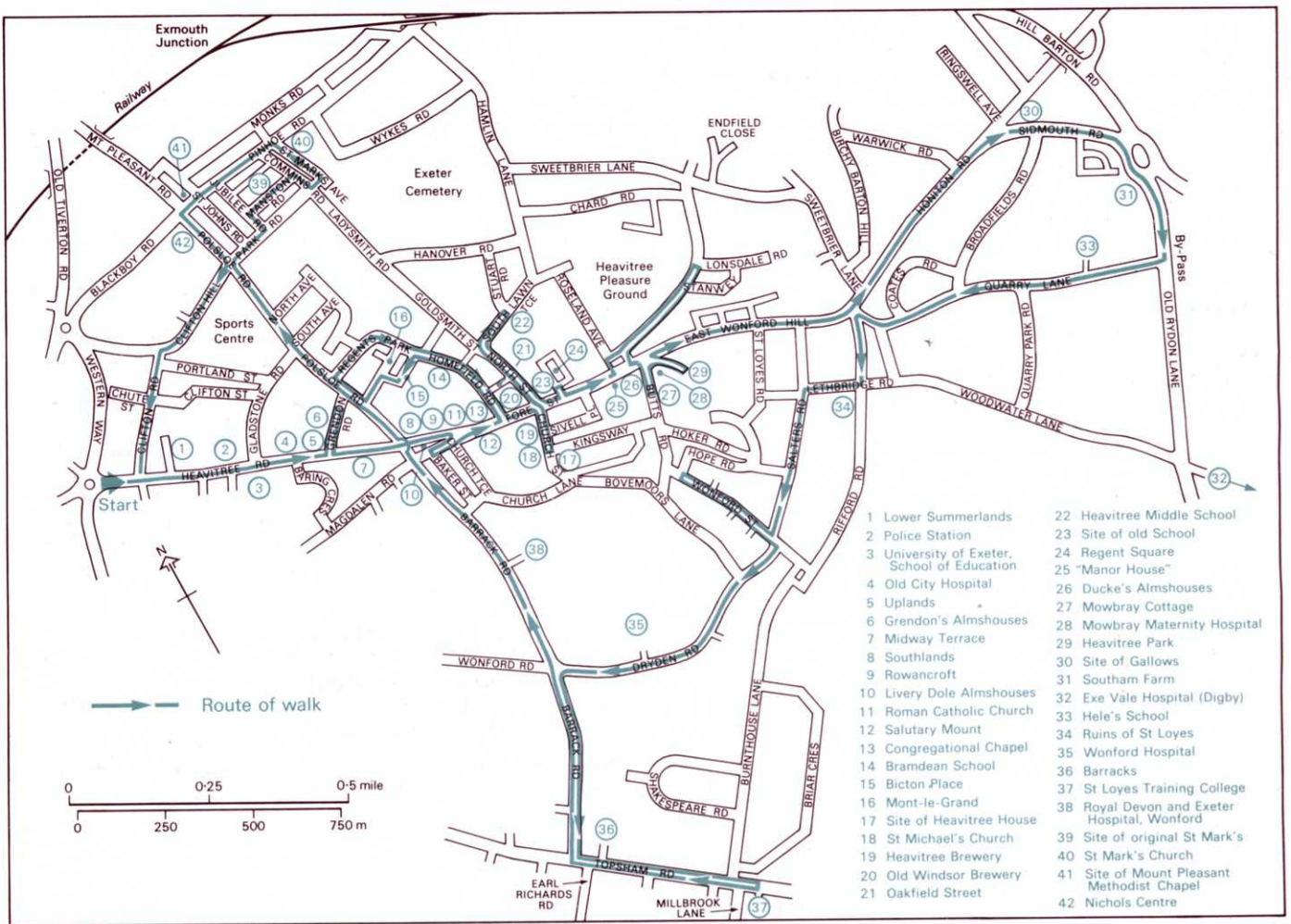


Discovering Exeter 3/Heavitree





Exeter Civic Society 1983

Foreword

Heavitree

by Trevor Falla

Note of series

Discovering Exeter:

- 1 *St David's*, by Joyce Greenaway
- 2 *St Leonard's*, by Gilbert Venn
- 3 *Heavitree*, by Trevor Falla
- 4 *Pennsylvania*, by Hazel Harvey (in preparation)

The large suburb of Heavitree forms the subject of the third booklet in the series 'Discovering Exeter'. As in the studies of St David's and St Leonard's, an historical background is followed by a guide for walking.

The special character of Exeter is usually considered to radiate from its famous inner-city sites, of which the Cathedral Close is undoubtedly the foremost; but, more than most cities of comparable size, its charm is amplified by several of its suburbs, some of equal antiquity, and the Civic Society keeps a careful watch for proposed developments which could spoil their appearance and amenities.

Heavitree has given its name to a warm red sandstone (actually a polymictic breccia containing quartzite, porphyry and sanidine fragments) quarried within its boundaries and used extensively in many churches of the city but, surprisingly, not much used in the village itself. Although the best Heavitree stone will last for many centuries if it is protected from frost, its weathering and eventual crumbling nature must have been well known to the inhabitants: in 1890 they completed replacing their red sandstone church with a magnificent new one built of limestone.

Our thanks go, as ever, to the members of the Publications Committee, led with undiminished energy by Harold Trump. We are especially indebted to Trevor Falla, a North Countryman who has lived in Heavitree for several years, for assembling such a wealth of material about his adopted home.

The Society once more gratefully acknowledges grant-aid from the Iverdean and Northcott Trusts.

D J C Laming
Chairman Exeter Civic Society

Front cover *Heavitree Parish from the roof of the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital, Wonford*

Back cover *A horse-drawn tram near Uplands, Heavitree Road, c. 1900*

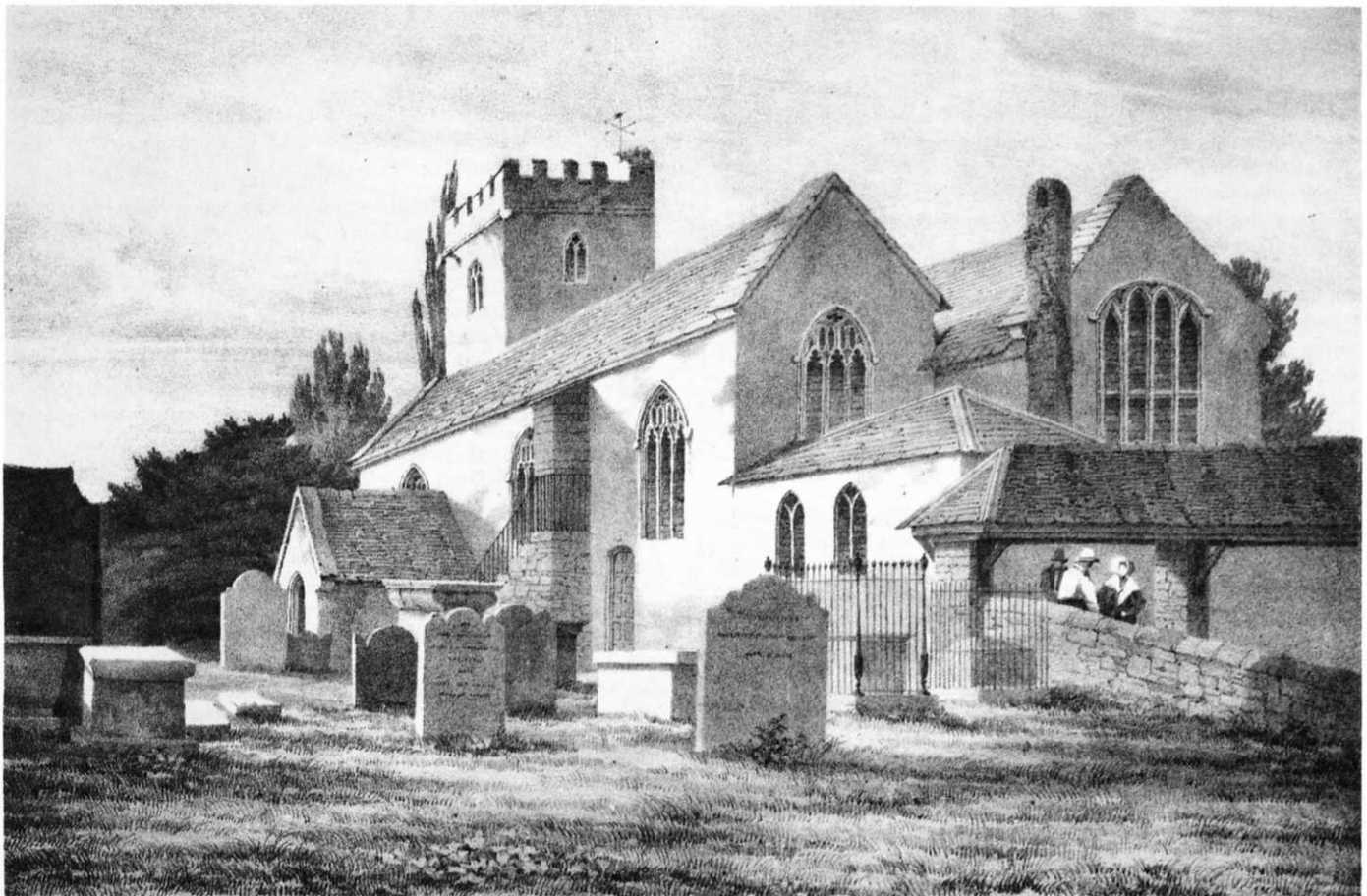
It is difficult to imagine Heavitree, now a suburb of Exeter, as a small agricultural village in rural surroundings on the London Road, but so it was in the early nineteenth century. Until 1913 it was independent of the former City and County of Exeter. As in any suburb, indications of the former village can still be seen, and it is interesting to look for these while walking around the parish. In spite of its small population, Heavitree was the largest and most important of the parishes adjoining the City, its 3,500 acres enclosed by boundaries extending from the River Exe to Stoke Hill, and from Livery Dole to beyond the modern by-pass. Moreover, until the nineteenth century St. David and St. Sidwell, although for civil purposes part of Exeter, were chapelries of Heavitree.

The full extent of the ancient boundaries is most clearly expressed in the report of the beating of the bounds in May, 1897, when members of the Urban District Council and others met at Victoria Park Road at 7.30 a.m. "The Gentlemen assembled" included Col. Vaughan, chairman of the U D C, several councillors, the Rev. Howells, a Baptist minister, and Dr. Jellett, the Medical Officer of Health. They walked via Magdalen Street, Baring Crescent and Polsloe Road to Rosebarn Lane and Stoke Hill, then almost to Pinhoe, stopping for a "good breakfast at the Half Moon" in Whipton. At 11.15 a.m. they continued to Hollow Lane and across country to the Blue Ball, Sandygate, and then along Rydon Lane to Pynes Hill for lunch. Afterwards the party followed the brook to the River Exe, where some marked the boundary by rowing up the river. They finally returned to Victoria Terrace at 6.30 p.m., after a walk of twenty miles.

This guide does not attempt to cover the whole of the ancient parish. It is limited on the north by the Exmouth railway line, the boundary with Whipton; on the west the boundary with St. Leonard is squared off to a line down Barrack Road, and ignores the old inroads made by Heavitree into St. Leonard's; to the south and east the natural lines of the Exe and the by-pass, which approximate to the historic boundary, are followed. Small areas outside Heavitree are included, at the beginning and end of the tour.

Even older than the name Heavitree is that of Wonford, taken from the stream running from Stoke Hill, where it is now called Mincinglake, to Northbrook Park on Topsham Road. It first occurs in a Saxon charter of 937 A.D. as Wynford, and although other derivations can be explained, the fact that many streams and rivers retain Celtic names suggests that it is from the Celtic *gwyn ffrwd*, meaning the white, fair, or holy stream. The stream gave its name to the manor of Wonford, which belonged to the Saxon kings, and the name of this important royal holding became accepted for the ancient territorial division of the hundred.

Professor W G Hoskins suggests that the hundred court may well have met at the "heafod treow", Anglo-Saxon for the "head or chief tree", and this is one interpretation of the origin of the name Heavitree, which first occurs in Domesday Book (1086) as Hevetrova. A possible place for the meetings may have been the churchyard, which commands a fine view, and was within a few hundred yards of both the main Roman roads into Exeter, and of the ancient ridgeway running along Polsloe Road to Mount Pleasant. The derivation of "tree" is not disputed, but there are alternative explanations of the first element. It may have come from a personal name, or from *hefa*, a head, in which case it could have meant "the tree on which heads (of criminals) were placed". We know that executions once took place on the gallows at Livery Dole.



Heavitree Church, lithograph by W Speat, 1842

