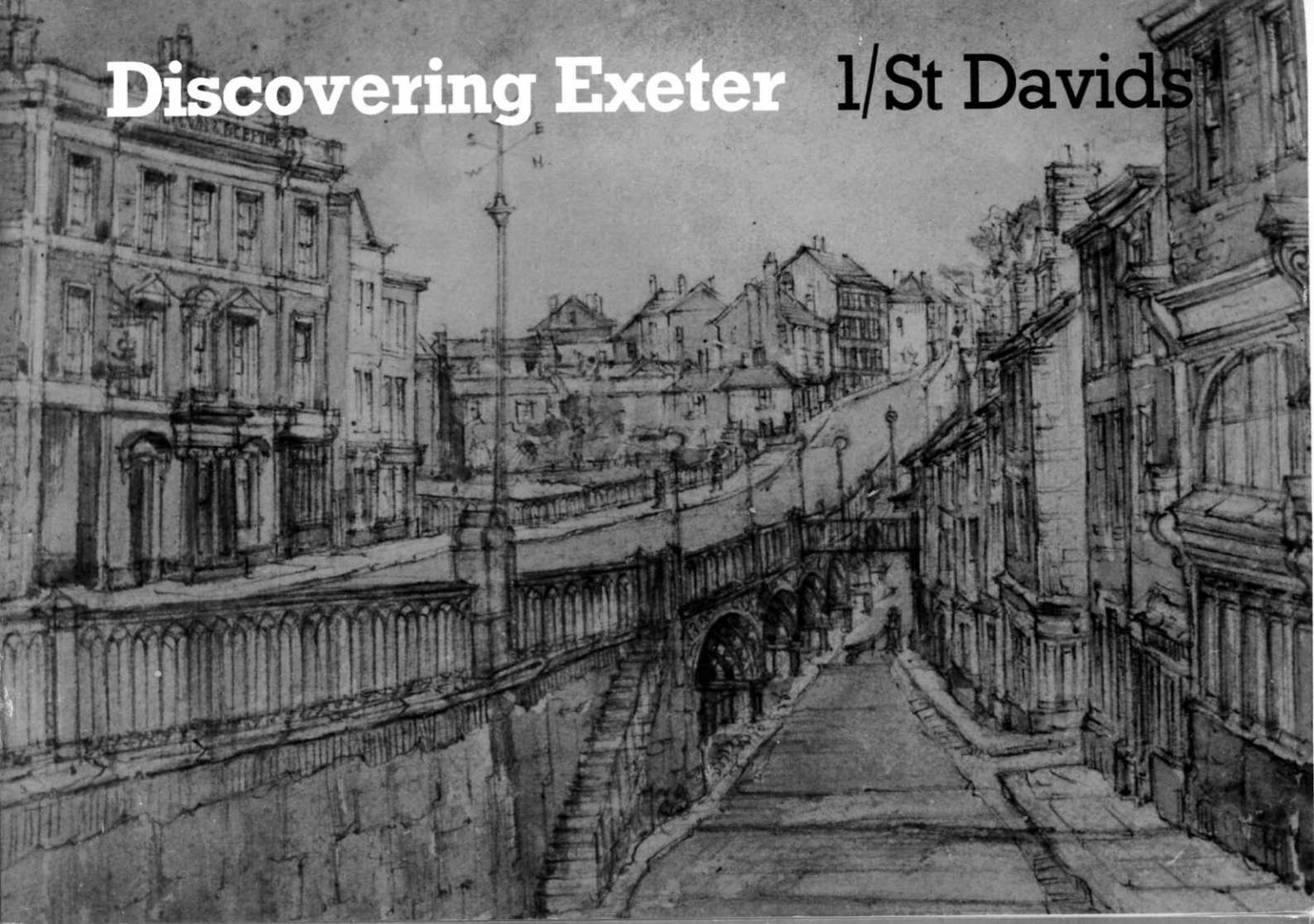


Discovering Exeter 1/St Davids



Front and back covers: drawing of the Iron Bridge by Miss P. V. Pitman.

DISCOVERING EXETER
1. ST. DAVIDS
by **JOYCE GREENAWAY**
1981

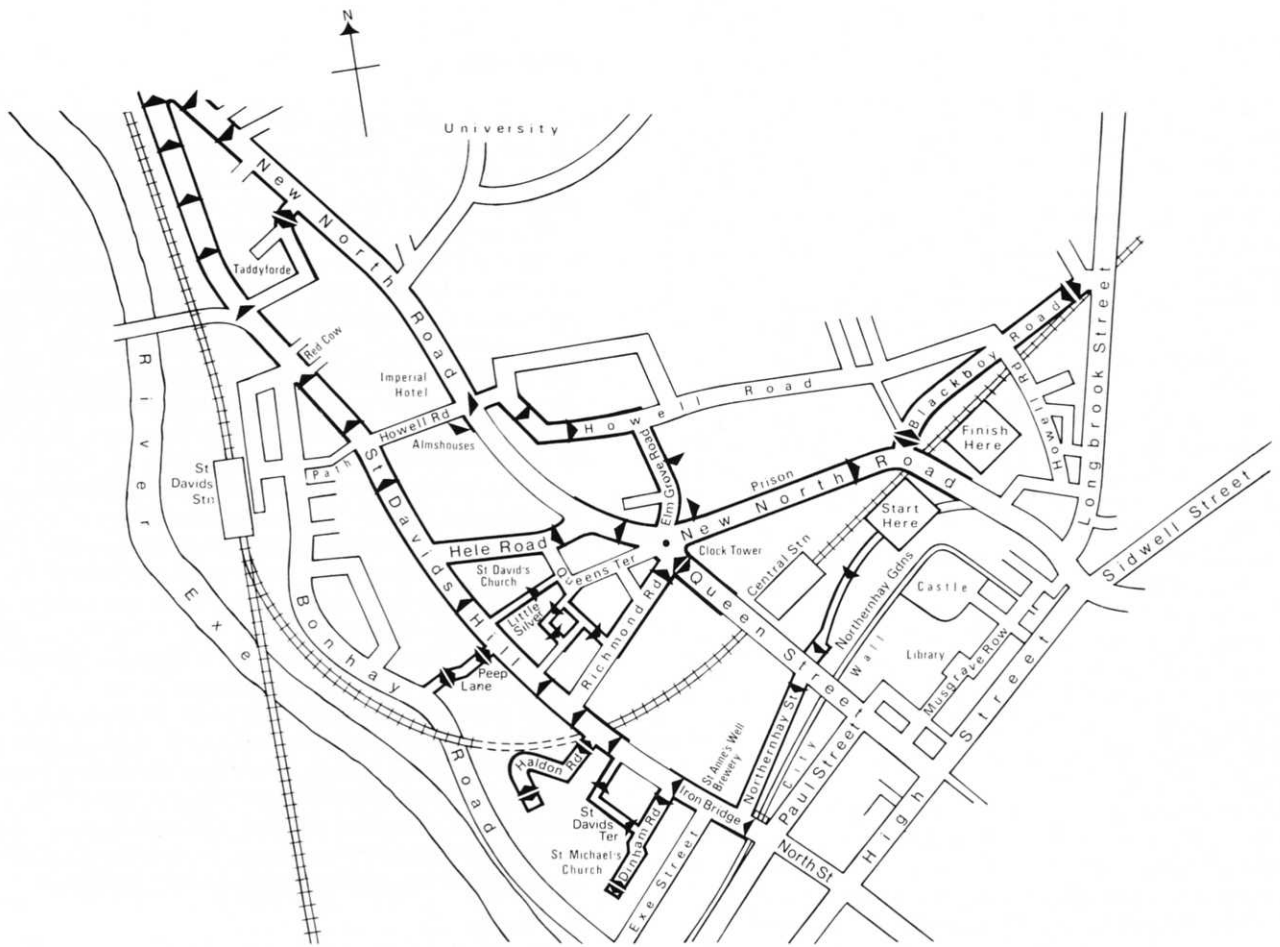
Foreword

Exeter is a city of great charm and character which has been damaged, but not irretrievably harmed, by wartime bombing and post-war development. Unsympathetic new building has disfigured the main thoroughfares, but side streets and ancient alleyways have largely retained the features which adorn them. This series of Guide Books therefore — unlike earlier ones — concentrates attention on the less obvious aspects of Exeter and the authors conduct their readers along a route which is not the one they are likely to follow unguided. Such an unorthodox approach does not mean that prominent buildings are ignored but they are seen in perspective. Sufficient history is given to explain both the present street scene and the buildings themselves.

The authors are members of Exeter Civic Society and the Society hopes that the Tours outlined in the books will prove exciting and interesting and will arouse in those who follow them a deeper affection for the city and a determination to preserve its heritage and to add to it in an understanding way. Financial aid from the Iverdean and Northcott Trusts has enabled the Society to produce these Guides at a modest price without denuding its conservation funds.

Mrs Joyce Greenaway, the author of this booklet, has been assisted by a small committee to which Mrs Sheila Stirling has acted as secretary, all have generously given their services. The Society is also grateful to Mr Dominic Hibberd who, some years ago, made a pictorial survey of St David's and suggested the need for measures of rehabilitation. Some have been carried through but much remains to be done.

H. J. Trump
(Chairman, Exeter Civic Society)



2

Discovering Exeter 1. St. David's.

Today the St. David's area seems an integral part of the city rather than a suburb. Yet only two hundred years ago a walk from the High Street to the Church of St. David would have taken one from a congested city to a rural "St. David's Down". At that time a man would have gone through the North Gate, the only way out on that side of the city, down a narrow steep lane (Lower North Street) across the Longbrook, and up another steep hill to a small sixteenth century church on St. David's Hill. It stood alone on the hill apart from the Pack Horse Inn and a few cob cottages; some have vanished, but three remain in Little Silver today. If the walker turned to look back on the city he would see the newly-built stone houses of prosperous merchants in Northgate Street (North Street), the place crowded with horses, carts and carriages, and, within the enclosing wall of Rougemont stone, the spires of St. Kerrian, St. Pancras and St. Paul (the spires later removed), with the towers of the Cathedral Church of St. Peter dominating the scene.

In close proximity to the city St. David's is a suburb of interest, variety and even surprise. From early medieval times the parish was a part of the ancient manor of "Durierde". This "deer fold" extended from Poltimore to the river Exe and from Stoke Canon to St. David's Hill. Wild pig and the fierce wild boar roamed Duryard's wooded hills and valleys as well as deer. King Athelstan made a gift of the manor to the city in the tenth century. Other Saxon kings were invited to hunt there, including Edward the Confessor on the occasion of Bishop Leofric's installation in Exeter Cathedral in 1050, when the see was moved from Crediton. A much diminished Duryard valley remains today, lying behind Cowley Bridge

Road and rising to Wreford's Lane in the north. It is built on only at its fringes, further building being disallowed. Exeter City Council has plans for creating a nature reserve and valley park here, and the decision of the Environment Minister in May 1981 to make agricultural changes in the valley dependent on permission of the Council opens the way for this.

In medieval times the northern outskirts of the city remained the bleaker, less populated area, away from roads running to London and Bristol. Refugees from the Saxons, who seized the city in the seventh century, and from the Normans in 1068 escaped beyond the north wall. Seventeenth-century maps designate the area "Little Britayne" and the term is not unknown today. In 1194 there were evidently people living there for a small chapel was then built on the crest of the hill, under the charge of the Vicar of Heavitree who appointed and paid a curate. It was dedicated to St. David, thus giving a name to the whole area.

In early Tudor times St. David's Hill, leading to the small church, was the only road in the parish, but the steep St. Clement's Lane — still there — led down from the hill to a small chapel in the swampy valley near the site of the modern railway station. This St. Clement's chapel belonged to St. Nicholas Priory which had bought plots of Duryard from the city and established water-mills on the Exe. The chapel was liable to flooding, and so was abandoned after the suppression of the Priory in Henry VIII's time. St. Clement's Lane was a useful approach to water mills on the Exe, and later to the nineteenth-century railway station. It is one of the oldest lanes outside the walled city.

3

