

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 10th Dec 2025

'Exeter Civic Society and our Work in Heavitree'

Keith Lewis, Chair of Exeter Civic Society. The Civic Society's chairman Keith Lewis will talk about the Society's role in upholding high standards of planning and architecture and educating people in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the city. He will also show how they help to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest across the city. Some of their activity in the Heavitree area and the new Tree Preservation task force which hopes to map the trees in Heavitree Pleasure Grounds will also be highlighted.

Wed 11th Mar 2026

'The lost rivers of Exeter and Heavitree'

John Davidson

Wed 10th Jun 2026

'Devon in the 1920s: Shadows and Sunshine'

Julia Neville

Wed 9th Sep 2026

TBC and AGM

Alan and Ruth Brend's Heavitree Memories



Alan and Ruth Brend were both born in Heavitree in the 1930s and lived there until moving to the Duryard area of Exeter in 1961. They very kindly contacted the Society and offered to share their memories of Heavitree – some of which go back over 80 years.

Remembering the Second World War

Alan was born on 23rd July 1934 at 6 Sivell Place in Heavitree. Ruth was born on 4th May 1936 at 18 Woodstock Road in St Loyes. Both have strong childhood memories of the Second World War.

"I remember the day war was declared" said Alan. "I was playing in the garden at Sivell Place and was called in to listen to the radio broadcast. My father was a gas fitter with the Exeter Gas Company and he was drafted in as a Sergeant Fire Warden. I used to go out with him every evening as he went on patrol. Looking back it's amazing I was allowed out with my father. One night numbers 1-5 Sivell Place, the properties right next to ours, were hit by a German bomb. I had been woken up when the sirens went off. I remember the noise of the planes, then an eerie silence followed by an explosion. My father used a stirrup pump to fight the fire. We had a lucky escape as the fire singed our walls. The neighbouring houses were destroyed".

Ruth's house in Woodstock Road was also attacked. "It was early in the war and I was asleep in bed when we heard an air raid warning" recalls Ruth. "A bomb was dropped and it actually bounced off the corner of our house and fell in Cranbrook Road. The impact blew our front door half way up the stairs. I remember sitting on the sofa with glass all around. The wall of our house bowed and we had to go and live in St Thomas for a year. My father went off to Swindon to work in aircraft manufacture so it was a very disruptive time for the family".

It was a very nerve-wracking period. "The enemy planes would often fly over Exeter on their way further north" said Alan "but we knew that if they had

spare bombs they could drop them on the way back. So you could never relax once the planes had left the area on their outward flight. You feared what might happen on their return. The German planes had a low ‘mmmmmm’ sound”.

Ruth remembers particularly well the night of the 4th May Blitz in 1942. It was her 6th birthday! “I was all excited but then the sirens went off and we sought refuge in our Morrison Shelter. I don’t think my mother thought we would survive so she said I should open my presents, but it was so dark that I gave up”. Alan’s father spent the blitz repairing gas pipes. He wasn’t allowed to sign up for the armed forces as he was in a reserved occupation.

Alan was at Ladysmith Infant and Junior Schools during the war and remembers how normal it all seemed much of the time. “However, we had to leave school when the sirens went off, and were allocated to a house in a local street. After a time the School developed its own shelter in a cloakroom. Sometimes we would go and look at the aftermath of an explosion. A bomb was dropped on Mitchell’s Orchard behind Sivell Place so we went to explore there. We had to come to terms with tragedies. A friend of mine was killed in Normandy Road”.

Alan also spent a lot of time in Heavitree Pleasure Ground watching our own planes flying over towards Exeter airport. “We knew all the planes and their sounds, like Spitfires”. He also recalls meeting Americans for the first time. “Land girls from up north were billeted in Sivell Place and the US soldiers would come and take them out. We did very well for chewing gum from the Americans”.

Heavitree Pleasure Grounds

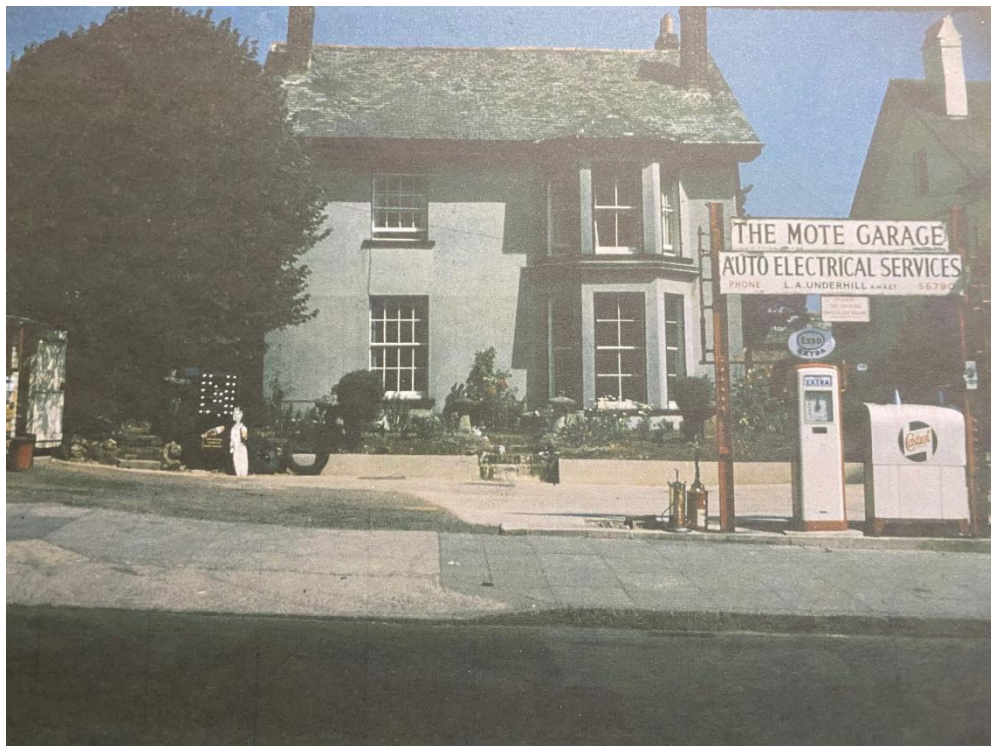
It’s no surprise that Alan was drawn to the Pleasure Grounds. He says “That’s where you had to go when I was a boy. I can remember being taken to the sandpit there when I was small. Later I’d watch Heavitree United playing there. It was before they moved to Wingfield Park. My father played for the Club in the 1930s and was Chairman in the 40s. He would take me sometimes to away games on the team coach, places like Ilfracombe and Barnstaple. People didn’t have cars then”. Alan’s father also played for Heavitree Cricket Club and beautiful photos of the football and cricket teams from around 100 years ago proudly hang on the walls of his home.

Ruth has fond memories of the Pleasure Grounds too. “I used to have music lessons in Hamlin Lane and I would walk back home through the park. I never used to worry at all. I loved to swing on the swings. They went very high. You could go a long way up on them”.

Despite not living in Heavitree for well over 60 years Alan still likes to visit.



“I’m never happier than in Heavitree Pleasure Grounds” he says. Now Alan has signed up for a seniors’ Group in the Park Cafe.



Running the Petrol Station

People are often surprised to hear that there has been a petrol station where the current one is in front of Tesco Extra in Fore Street for over 100 years. The first one was established around 1920. It was known as the Mote Garage and in 1951 was bought by Ruth's father, Lionel Arthur Underhill, and the family moved in to the house that then stood behind it.

Ruth recalls "There were some big sheds behind the house where a Mr Blatchen ran a transport business including moving cattle around. We took over the sheds when we moved in and let the area out for car parking. There was room for a furniture store too. Behind the sheds was an orchard. Beautiful greengages grew there fertilised by pig poo.

"I used to serve petrol. You had to be very careful with the high level swinging gantry that allowed you to put petrol in cars in the road. If you didn't operate it correctly you would be splashed by the fuel and it really stung! We had daytime opening hours but if the police knew that someone was desperate for petrol at night they would knock on the door and we would help out.

"Cars were on the increase then and I passed my test on Christmas Eve aged 18. I think the examiner showed some Christmas spirit.



Courting 1950s style

How did Alan and Ruth get together? Ruth says "We were both on the same bus going to Heavitree and got off at the same stop. Alan followed me at a discreet distance but obviously took a fancy. The problem was I already had a boyfriend. Then by coincidence the three of us were at a Saturday dance and my boyfriend asked Alan to take me home as he was going in the opposite direction. That was that really. We went off to dances in Exmouth and I often had the use of my father's car. Alan insisted on taking me by motorbike one time and I had to put a crash helmet on my carefully prepared hair. I wasn't best pleased! At the time, the men having to go off for National service for two years split a lot of friendships. We survived all the early challenges and got married in Lymptone in 1961. We moved to West Garth Road in Duryard and have lived there ever since. We've now been married for 64 years. Although we left Heavitree we have very happy memories of our early days there".

A big thank you to Alan and Ruth for their recollections.

Martin Weiler



Photo by Mote Garage: L to R – Lionel Arthur Underhill, Sybil Underhill (Ruth's father and mother) and Arthur Fricker (Ruth's Uncle).

Our Previous Meeting: Researching Family History: Stories from Heavitree; Sue Bond, Research Coordinator, Devon Family History Society.



Family history and local history are deeply intertwined. Many people in the HLHS will know that we can't go far with family history without exploring

the area our ancestors lived in.

Sue talked us through useful sources for family history; the story of a family in Heavitree and how DFHS might be able to help with research.

Useful sources:

- Censuses (1841-1921), 1939 Register

1841 – the least helpful. Has names, male occupations, born in/outside the country, no relationships. Ages are rounded up or down for adults; children's are accurate. We can't be certain and it can be dangerous to make assumptions: we need 3 things about a person to be sure it is them.

1851-1901 – roughly the same: address, names, but this time with relationships, occupation and place of birth. Much more useful to use to find birth and baptism records.

1911 – additional info – number of children alive/dead, number of years married.

1921 – most recently released. Tells us who was working for whom and what they were doing. Useful to see big employers of the time.

1931 – destroyed

1939 Register – at the outbreak of WWII to issue identity cards. Also used in 1949 to allocate NHS numbers. Blank lines across names of people who might still be alive. Gives exact dates of birth.

1941 – not taken

1951 – won't be released until 2052

- Baptisms/births, marriages and deaths/burials

***Freebmd.org.uk** – easier to search here first. You can search by county, registration district, surname. Once you've found the person, look on the government website. After 1870/80 it tells you the age someone died.*

***Gro.gov.uk** – here you can search 2 years either side of a date, for births and deaths but not marriages. Tells you the age of any death, having the correct ages makes it easier to send for the correct death certificate.*

***Parish registers** – find baptisms (not the same as births – many took place when the child was a good few months old), marriages and burials. Parish registers for Devon are available on Find My Past (chargeable).*

- Maps

***National Library of Scotland:** www.nls.uk and **Know Your Place** <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition:devon>*

- **Directories**

White's Devon – can see occupations (University of Leicester special collections online)

Paterson's Roads – The Public Domain Review 1826

AA Book of C19th – all the routes etc. Very complementary about Heavitree's salubrious air.

- **Newspapers (BNA)**

94,736,236 pages dating from the 1700s and more constantly being added. Includes: **Exeter & Plymouth Gazette** (1827-52), **Daily Telegram** (1869-1885), **Exeter Flying Post** (1800-1900), **Exeter Leader** (1980-1999), **Exmouth Chronicle** (1920-1920), **Exmouth Journal** (1869-1913), **Express & Echo** (1866-1963)

- **Wills**

Many were destroyed in WWII.

Devon Wills Project: should be able to find wills made, but often just shows one was made but no details.

Family Search Catalog: Wills for the Diocese of Exeter (county of Devon 1812-1857)

After 1857, search probate records for documents and wills on gov.uk – it's £1.80 to send for any will (all are public property)

- **One place studies/ one name studies**

If an area has a one-place study, it is worth contacting the people running it. They'll be volunteers but very keen to share information and knowledge. It could be a street, village etc (not a town – this would be too big). Or search your surname on <http://one-name.org>

A Heavitree family:

1871 – John Brewer (28) born Colyton Raleigh, and his wife Anne born Farrington, were living in Fore Street, Heavitree. We don't know the number but could work it out in relation to other census entries, for example of they were next to a pub or police station.

At this time few people were born in Heavitree – most were coming in for work. Mr Brewer was a tailor. Looking backwards, we can find his baptism on FMP. He was born to a carpenter and was baptised in 1842. In the 1861 census he was still in

Colyton Raleigh and clearly did his apprenticeship there, before coming to Heavitree to work.

The birth of his youngest child, Alice, was registered in 1869 in St Thomas district (free BMD). The mother's maiden name was White. Knowing this opened up more information – the plans for their marriage in 1866 (it is also worth looking at the witness for marriages – they might be other family members). The marriage certificate was signed, so they could write.

Looking at baptisms, a son was born in Exeter and baptised in St Sidwells. He was

named William Henry White Brewer. Alice was baptised in Heavitree by Rev. Henry Barnes of the Gordon Lamp and actress daughters.

1881 – Their tailor's shop was next to the Horse and Groom on Fore Street. Only one son was apprenticed to the father, and there were four more children, all born in Heavitree.

1891 – They were living in 8 Isca Terrace, but we know they were actually at 8 Fore Street. There's no record of



8 Fore Street is now Spice Box, 48 Fore Street, Heavitree

an Isca Terrace so we are not sure if they called this terrace Isca. Two sons were learning tailoring and the oldest daughter was assisting in house at the age of 16.

1901 – Still at 8 Fore Street next door to the Horse and Groom (at the beginning of each census section you can work out the direction of the enumerator's route). Edgar was apprenticed to a woman draper (a link to tailoring, but doing his own thing).

1911 – Couldn't find them. It's often a struggle to find people – it could've been a poor record or they could have died. She then found out that John died aged 61 in 1903. He died of chronic bronchitis and cardiac failure, and his death was registered by one of his sons. He is buried in Heavitree churchyard. This is from the National Calendar of Wills (on Ancestry, FMP or Gov website). His wife died in the same period, at 65, and is buried in Heavitree. The site www.findagrave.com was useful to find them. They must have had some money to be able to have a grave – most wouldn't.

So this is why they couldn't be found on the census. In 1911 there was just one son listed as living at 8 Fore Street, working as a tailor. Two others were living at 4 Baring Cottages.

1921 – Frank was living at Sagona Terrace in Parr Streer (destroyed in the Blitz). He was working for the Brewer Brothers so had obviously kept on tailoring. His mother in law was living with them, so we could assume his wife's surname was Widgery.

1939 Register – Frank, now a widower, was still a tailor, living at 4 Sagona Terrace. Doris Brewer, Frank's daughter, had also married a Widgery, so it seems she may have married a distant cousin.

BNP Archive – featured a 1921 Brewer Brothers advert, listing them as a member of the National Federation of Merchant Tailors. There are often misdemeanours to be found in newspapers, so the fact that we didn't find more means they probably behaved themselves!

Besleys 1939 – 8 Fore Street was still a tailor but under the family name Yendole, so it must've changed hands or moved.

Where to start?

- **Online free sites**

Genuki.org.uk (v good for Devon – towns and villages – each parish has a page. Bibliography of books/articles about place)

Ogindex (one man, covers England, Wales and Isle of Mann. Doesn't work for Heavitree. A signposting website)

Cyndislist.com (american but covers world. Would tell you where to go to find records)

Familysearch.org

- **Commerical sites** (be careful how you search them – they don't like too much or too little!)

Ancestry: search – card catalogue (Devon)

FMP: search – all record sets (Devon). Easy to get Baptisms, Marriages and Burials but non conformist records don't appear that way. Search 'everything' for those

Family Search: Mormon site. So much on it; initially hard to use. Search – research wiki (free)

- **Record offices** (but so many things not digitised)
- **The National Archives** Discovery Website
- **Devon Family History Society**

Based at Tree House in King Street, open three days a week. There's a members' fee, or for £3 non members can access subscriptions on computers, parish and family files, library and indexes (a large part are in storage at the moment), family search affiliate library, help and advice, regularly online and FTF meetings. Membership is £18 a year and includes a quarterly journal and access to members' area.



Heavitree in the 1920s

We had a large group of 35 people attend our walk, exploring 1920s Heavitree through various stopping points in and around Fore Street.

As Heavitree entered the 1920s it was still reeling from two big impacts. Firstly, the devastating impact of the First world War. Over 230 local people were killed in the conflict. They are remembered on the Roll of Honour in the Parish Church and in a booklet published by the Heavitree Local History Society.

Secondly, there was the loss of independence. Until 1913, Heavitree had its own Urban District Council but in that year it was 'annexed' by Exeter. The war delayed the full implications, but the new decade saw Exeter start to truly take over.

Pleasure Ground

The Heavitree Pleasure Ground had been opened in 1906 – one of the major achievements of the old District Council. In the Twenties many of the facilities we see today – the play area, bowling green and tennis courts – were already established. However, there were some differences. Heavitree Football Club rented a field in the winter for their games, and grazing of animals still took place.

Trams

The electric tram network had been running since 1904 with a terminus at

Cross Park Terrace in Heavitree. The war had decimated the tram workforce, and a number of accidents took place possibly as a result. In August 1917 a tramcar jumped the points just below the Royal Oak pub, hitting a nearby house and demolishing its garden rails and porch.

The Twenties were the last decade the trams ran, the system closing in 1931. The trams ran between 7.15am and 11pm. It cost 2d to travel from the Guildhall in Exeter out to Heavitree. The trams had to run quietly on Sundays so as not to disturb church and chapel services.

Interestingly, as today, potholes were a problem along the road surfaces in Heavitree. As a result, cyclists and pedestrians used to make their way along the tram network contributing to its wear and tear.



Motor Cars

In 1904 only 20 cars were registered for use in Exeter. By 1920 it was 140 and growing fast. The number of cars driving down Exeter High Street each day rose from 1,314 in 1920 to 5,901 in 1930. Many of these cars would drive through Heavitree too. A sign of how many is the arrival of petrol filling stations in Heavitree in the 1920s. In 1923 Harry Edmonds Courtenay opened a filling station on Fore Street where the current Tesco one is. In 1926 AWE Crocker opened another one out at Gallows Corner.

Education

Heavitree's school was opened in 1840 on the site in Fore Street where the

Co-op now stands. Older boys moved to South Lawn Terrace in 1871, but infants continued to start their educational journey in the centre of Heavitree until 1937.

Shops

The Twenties were still the days of lots of independent shops like greengrocers, butchers, bakers, ironmongers, newsagents, drapers, and boot makers. Heavitree had them all along Fore Street. Some were long-lasting establishments like Leymans –a watchmaker and jeweller, and Grant Artur, the hairdresser. Both were there in 1901 and still in 1939 or later. So was John Thorn the ironmonger. The shops weren't all independent in the 1920s. One of the first chain stores in Fore Street was Eastmans the butchers who operated from 1906 to 1957 in what is now number 74 (next to the Gun and sports shop). The company was formed in 1889 and had over a thousand branches by 1914. In 1923 it in turn was swallowed up by a bigger fish, the American owned Union Cold Storage Company which ran cattle ranches throughout the Americas. So Heavitree had a US multinational company in the Twenties.

Banks

The first bank in Heavitree was the Union of London and Smiths Bank which opened in 1906 where number 34 Fore Street is. By 1919 this had become the National Provincial and Union Bank of England. In 1927 it moved to next to Ellis's Place; by then it was just called the National Provincial Bank. In the 1970s it expanded next door and was renamed as The National Westminster Bank, and latterly as NatWest.

Pubs

The main pubs in Fore Street would have been instantly recognised in the 1920s – The Royal Oak, the Ship and Pelican, and the Horse and Groom, were all here and had been for many decades. The Horse and Groom later became associated with one of Heavitree's sporting heroes who blossomed in the Twenties. Cliff Bastin attended Ladysmith School and joined Exeter city as a youngster. He made his debut for their reserves aged 15 in 1927 and played for the first team the following year – the youngest ever until 2016 His outstanding form drew scouts from all over the country, and he was sold to Arsenal in 1929. He went on to be their record goal scorer for many years and played for England 21 times. After retiring he came back to Heavitree and was landlord of the Horse and Groom.

Brewery

Heavitree Brewery had been established in 1790 and moved to Church Street in the early 19th Century. Although a very successful company, both in

making beer and owning pubs, it was almost brought to its knees around 1920. The Manager embezzled considerable funds and fled to Canada. However, he was caught and sentenced to three years penal servitude and his accomplice to 12 months imprisonment. Things were saved by a supplier of the brewery whose bills were not being paid. He asked to see the books and was horrified. He was subsequently appointed to the board and set about putting everything in order.

Churches

In addition to smaller chapels, the main Parish Church, St Michael's and All Angels (rebuilt 1846), and the United Reformed Church (opened 1903), were well established in the 1920s; the Catholic Church had yet to be built (opened 1932). One major change in the Parish Church came in 1923 when two galleries were removed thus substantially changing the internal look.



This Newsletter was published by the Heavitree Local History Society

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