

HEAVITREE STONE

2: The City Centre



So why Heavitree Stone? Or ‘bullock’s blood and gravel’ as it is known (can you see why?)

The story begins 280 million years ago when, hard to believe, this whole area was an arid desert. Far to the north violent storms raged and the torrential rain led to dramatic flash floods. The fragments of rock and pebbles carried by the floods settled, mixed with the red desert sand and were then compressed over the millennia into a distinctive red stone. Fast forward to human settlement in Exeter and people needed stone for building. The costs of transporting stone were much higher than the costs of quarrying it, so the nearer to home your supply, the better. There were outcrops of the red stone at Heavitree, and this was quarried from the early medieval period right up to relatively recent times. It is a coarse and rather soft stone, prone to weathering, but you can find all across our city. This leaflet takes you to eight particular examples, each with its own history, although you can find many more sightings of the stone on the walk. It is one of a series of three: the other two cover The Quay and St Thomas, and Heavitree itself.

R Rougemont Castle, at the top of Castle Street, was one of the first castles built by the Normans after the Conquest. They used volcanic stone, known as trap, quarried nearby (maybe from what became the castle moat, which



you will walk past a little later). However, you can see here how the gatehouse has been repaired over the centuries, often very skilfully and often using Heavitree Stone (some of which is now very weathered!) Also have a look at the plaque on your right. It tells of the last three women to be hanged as witches: and it happened here in Exeter.

P Weave your way through Rougemont Gardens past the moat, across Gandy Street and through the old covered market into the Guildhall Shopping Centre. Here, set at an angle, incongruous in the midst of modern shops and restaurants, is **St Pancras Church**. A noticeboard tells of a cycle of neglect and restoration since it was built in the 13th century. And some of those restorations used Heavitree Stone - see if you can pick it out.

St Pancras, by the way, was a young nobleman, said to be only 14 years old, who refused to renounce his Christian faith



and paid the price as a martyr at the hands of the Roman Emperor. The church is open every working day as a place of quietness and peace.

G The Guildhall

- Just over the way in Waterbeer Street is the back of the medieval Guildhall, built of Heavitree Stone and a marked contrast to the ornate Elizabethan frontage on the High Street. It is well worth going inside to have a look, but here at the back you can see the low windows of the cells where prisoners were held before appearing in court. You can see other examples of our stone along the street here; there may be even more of it hidden under modern render.



Now see if you can find Parliament Street to take you from Waterbeer Street back to the High Street. It is said to be the narrowest street in the world!

N Going down Fore Street and turning right into The Mint, you come

to the hidden gem of **St Nicholas Priory**. This was a Benedictine Priory, founded in 1080-87, so one of the oldest surviving medieval buildings in Exeter. There is plenty of Heavitree Stone in its walls and the old buildings around. In 1536 the Priory was dissolved and much of it was destroyed. The stone was used elsewhere, including in the old Exe Bridge and City Walls. The Woollen Trail Board here tells you much more about it. It is now open on Sundays from 1pm to 4pm.



S If you walk further down Fore Street and turn left into King Street, you come to

Stepcote Hill, which we think was the original way up into the city from the old Exe Bridge.

You can readily see how old this street and some of the buildings along it are. Look for numbers 11 and 15; St Mary Steps church at the bottom; and facing you in West Street, the famous House That Moved - not Heavitree Stone but a fascinating sight nevertheless!



P Back up to the High Street to **St Petrock's Church**, one of no less than six surviving city centre churches built with Heavitree Stone. One of the things that makes this one special is its mission working with homeless people.

C Further along the High Street is another Heavitree Stone built church, **St Stephen's**. Next to it is a low archway called **St**

Stephen's Bow. The story is that when King Henry VI visited Exeter in the mid 1400s and the Royal procession left the High Street to go to the Cathedral through this arch, the Bishop (Bishop Lacey) met them, boasting to his companions that the king would bow to him. And of course the king had to duck down to get through the arch! Anyway, duck under the arch yourself, and facing you are the evocative ruins of **St Catherine's Almshouses**, built in medieval times on the corner of the old Roman fortress, bombed in 1942 and now standing as a memorial to those who died in Exeter during those years. There is an excellent noticeboard to tell you more about its long history.



P Finally, past the oddly pink render on the Heavitree Stone tower of **St Martin's Church** into Cathedral Close. There is plenty of Heavitree Stone here; particularly the **Devon and Exeter Institution** but also the wall of the **Old Deanery**. Even the Cathedral has a fragment in the inner facework of the top stage of the north tower, which was rebuilt in 1393-95. The Institution, which is at number 7, was founded in 1813. Before that, from 1662 to 1813, it was the town house of the Courtenays, the Earls of Devonshire. And here seems a good place to end our trail.



Heavitree Stone leaflets are kindly sponsored by Exeter City Council and are presented by participants in the Heavitree Squilometre project, supported by Interwoven Productions CIC. Photographs © Chris Spinks / Clare Bryden

Other leaflets in this series are

1: Heavitree and **3: The Quay & St Thomas**

Q is for Quarries is an A-Z trail for mobiles

For more information go to heavitreequarrytrails.org.uk or scan the QR code below.

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