

HEAVITREE STONE

3: The Quay & St Thomas



So why Heavitree Stone? The story begins 280 million years ago when, hard to believe, this whole area was semi-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 it all across our city. This guide takes you to ten examples, each with its own history.

Start on the east side of the quay, where there are plenty of places for a coffee or other refreshments and you can browse in the craft cellars.

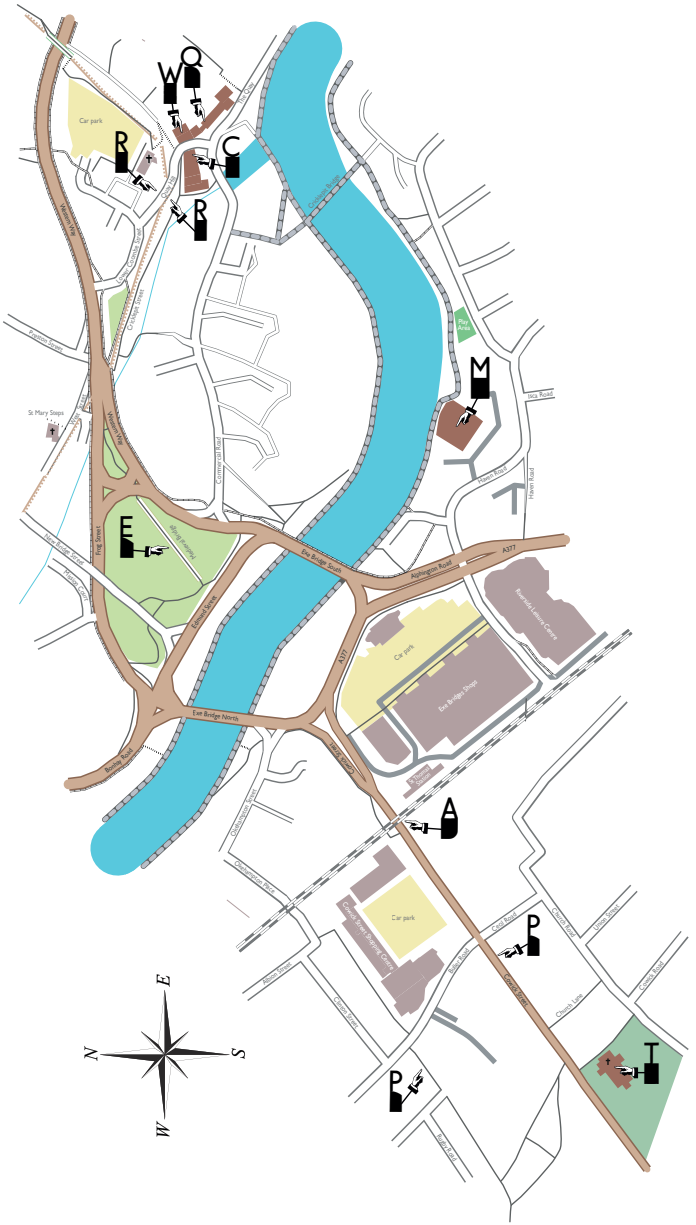
Q Exeter has been a port since Roman times. On the corner at the bottom of Quay Hill is the old **Quay House**, where you can see the original dock wall, weathered by the constant action of the water. (There is a good if rather defaced information board about the old Woollen Trade here.)



W The **rendered wall on the building next to the Quay House**. We've put this one in because it shows rather nicely how Heavitree Stone was often used. You can see how patches of the underlying stone are exposed where the render or facing stone has worn off. It was often used this way, as a kind of base layer with render or some other harder wearing material on top, so it is there but hidden under the facade of many old buildings in the city.

C **Custom House** - This was built in 1680 at the height of Exeter's woollen cloth industry and is well worth a visit. It has some great displays but is also renowned for its sweeping staircase and fantastic ornate plaster ceilings. Entrance is free. Walk a few yards back up Quay Hill and you can see Heavitree Stone on the corner and along the rear wall.







R Just up the hill from where you are standing is the imposing City Wall, originally built by the Romans 1800 years ago. They preferred the local volcanic rock for building, but later repairs were often done with Heavitree Stone - you can see what a patchwork it is! (There is an information board here about the wall.)

R Walk along the back of the Custom House. On your left is another section of the wall with an arch built into it. Just above here was the old Watergate, the way up into the city from the dock.



M Across the river and along the bank to the right is the **Old Malthouse**, now the Harvester pub. This was built in 1789 as a brewery (at one time there were no less than 25 breweries in Exeter!). But by 1850 it had specialised as a malthouse, preparing the malt for beer. This continued up until 1949.



P On the corner of Cowick Street and Buller Road is the entrance of the **Old Debtors Prison**, now Cowick Street Motors.



Along Buller Road, just beyond Wippells, there is an alley going left, here you can see parts of the old wall. This replaced an earlier prison which became notorious as the 'most feeble and insecure prison in the Kingdom'! Poor prisoners would have had a truly miserable time, sleeping in rat infested squalor, with only scraps of food. When the new prison opened in 1819, it wasn't much better. Prisoners were not supplied with food and many died of starvation.

T A little further up Cowick Street is **St Thomas the Apostle Church**.

Have a look inside, walk around the building, and find the memorial to Grace



Darling, who, as far as we know, had no connection whatsoever to Exeter! In 1549, after the Prayer Book Rebellion was put down, Robert Welshe, the vicar, was gruesomely executed, hauled to the top of the church tower in chains, in full vestments; his tarred body left there for nearly four years.

R Back down Cowick Street are the **Railway Arches.**

Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the great Victorian railway engineer, used Heavitree Stone here and, most famously, ten miles down the line at Starcross at the atmospheric railway pumping station. This experiment ran for nearly a year with trains using this clean technology from Exeter to Newton Abbot but ultimately it failed. What might have been! Blame the rats! Incidentally, the left hand archway has a lovely 1990 pigeon mural.



E Cross Exe Bridge North, on New Bridge Street you'll find another Woollen Trail Information Board. Look at the 800 year old medieval bridge with **St Edmund's Church** on it and then you can follow the riverbank back to the start, or walk up Fore Street, with its independent traders and cafes.

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 **2: City Centre.**

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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