



# Unlocking Exmoor's Heritage

**Evaluation of the Exmoor Society's  
heritage archiving project 2014-2016**



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### Introduction

This report was prepared for the Exmoor Society to review the its 'Unlocking Exmoor's Heritage' project which took place between March 2014 and June 2016.

The report provides an independent assessment of the achievements and legacy of the project at the end of June 2016 and looks ahead to a new project which starts in July 2016.

Evidence to inform the report has been drawn from a portfolio of material provided by the project's Outreach Archivist, Dr Helen Blackman,

an extended interview with her and shorter discussions with Rachel Thomas CBE (Chairman of the Society) and Karen Trigger (Treasurer).

The report covers the following topics:

- The origins of the project
- The development and funding of the project
- How the project operated
- Notable achievements and impacts
- The ongoing legacy of the project

### The origins of the project

The Exmoor Society was founded in 1958, four years after the National Park was designated, to promote the conservation and protection of Exmoor National Park for the public benefit. As well as campaigning successfully on a range of issues, organising regular events and conferences, doing educational work and publishing the annual Exmoor Review, the Society amassed an extensive collection of documents relevant to Exmoor (see **Figure 1**).

In 1967 the Society took a lease on the Parish Rooms on Rosemary Lane in Dulverton and its growing library of books, reports, maps, pamphlets, photographs and correspondence was stored on shelving and in boxes at this address.

Most of the Society's Archive covers the period since the National Park's creation and it provides an important contemporary record of key events, many of which were of national significance, helping to shape the UK's policy towards National Parks or the uplands.

These influential events, which are covered in the Archives, include the Society's successful opposition to moorland loss, the afforestation of large parts of the Royal Forest in the late 1950s, the registration of commons in the late 1960s and the Porchester Enquiry into the agricultural reclamation of Exmoor's moorland in 1977.



*The Society's library in the Parish Rooms office, as it was when the project started in 2014*

**Figure 1. Key collections held in the Exmoor Society's Archives**

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Victor Bonham-Carter (1913-2007), Chairman and later President of the Exmoor Society, farmer, author, publisher, Secretary of the Society of Authors and the Royal Literary Fund</li><li>• Malcolm MacEwen (1911-1996), a prominent figure in the National Parks Movement and author of two seminal books on national parks</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Correspondence of S H Burton (1919-2005), Chairman of the Exmoor Society, prolific author of books on the English countryside,</li><li>• Manuscripts and sketches of Hope Bourne (1918-2010), author of books on Exmoor, illustrator and painter</li><li>• Articles and photographs by Brian Chugg (1926-2003), artist, naturalist and freelance author</li></ul> |
|---|---|

In 2010, the renowned Exmoor artist and author Hope Bourne died, leaving a large legacy to the Exmoor Society. This included an extensive collection of her drawings, paintings, letters and manuscripts as well as her 700 books, many of which had been stored in damp conditions. The Society was faced with a challenge of how to catalogue and conserve this culturally important legacy.

The Society had been planning to move for several years and, with the addition of Bourne's legacy, it became clear that the Parish Rooms were no longer adequate for the Society's needs. Fortunately, around this time another charity was

able to purchase larger and more publicly accessible premises for the Society at 34 High Street in Dulverton and the move took place in June 2014.

Hope Bourne's legacy and the move to the new premises provided both the necessity and opportunity to take stock of the Society's documentary archive. The Society identified a need to prepare a more detailed catalogue of what it had and to make this catalogue available to the public, to conserve material that was in deteriorating or poor condition and to use its Archive to improve public understanding and appreciation of Exmoor.

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## The development and funding of the project

In 2011, the Society's Trustees decided to seek the appointment of a professional Outreach Archivist who would have the skills and time to place the Archive on a secure footing. A broad set of objectives were agreed (**Figure 2**). These went well beyond the simple cataloguing and conservation of the Society's Archive and included the important objectives of making the Archive available, and actively promoting it, for public education and research.

Central to the project's delivery was the intention to train and use volunteers to undertake much of the cataloguing work, providing a breadth of knowledge and expertise that would be an important legacy of the project.

A detailed project plan was developed and a budget was prepared. The total cost of the project to June 2016 was £251,307. As **Figure 3** shows, 59% of this came from the value of time committed by volunteers and 23% was the salary, expenses and other costs of employing the Archivist. The purchase of equipment and materials accounted for 6%, publicity and promotion costs for 5% and professional fees (such as document conservation) for 3%.

Money was committed from the Society's reserves and in 2012 the Society prepared and submitted funding applications to the National Park Authority's (NPA) Partnership Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

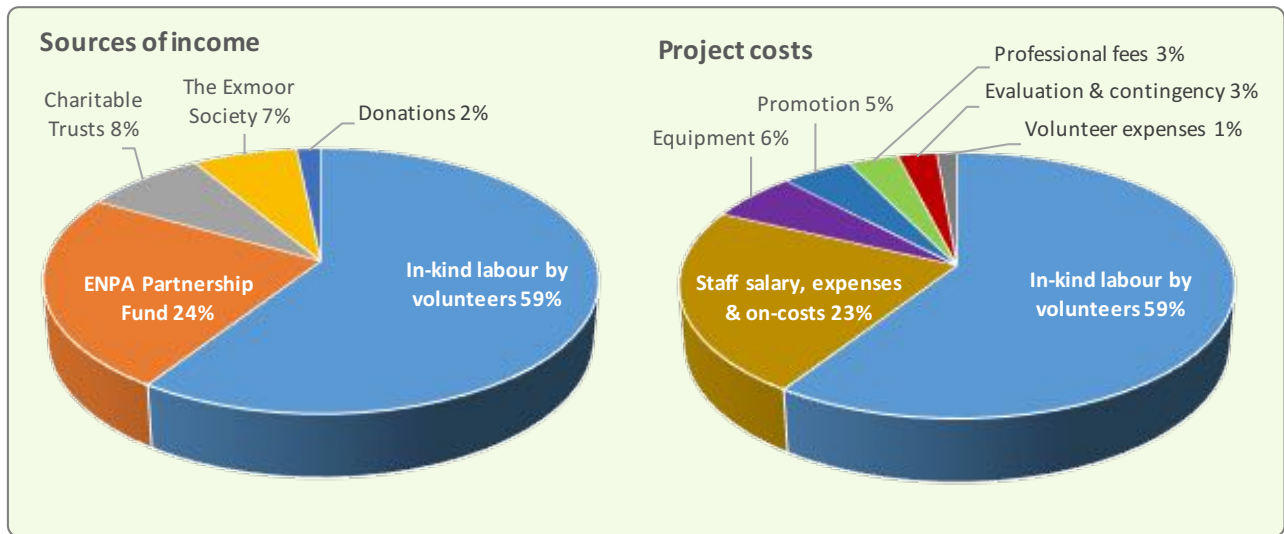
Two successive applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund were unsuccessful but the shortfall was met from awards from three private charitable trusts, from an increased offer from the NPA's Partnership Fund and from a further allocation from the Society's reserves. Nearly a quarter of the project costs were met from the NPA Partnership fund, 8% from charitable trusts, 7% from the Society's own funds and 2% from donations, with 59% being met in-kind from volunteer time (**Figure 3**).

After the necessary funds were secured in December 2013, the recruitment of the Outreach Archivist took place in January and February 2014 and Dr Helen Blackman, who had previously worked at Cambridge, Cardiff and Exeter Universities, took up the post in March of that year under a contract to June 2016.

**Figure 2. Objectives of the project**

- To learn and understand what the collection consists of
- To use the collection for educational and research purposes, including working with schools, special interest groups and universities
- To add to local stories, memories and associations within the area, and to those already published in the Exmoor Review
- To provide information and develop an IT strategy for remote access
- To preserve the material, some of which is in poor condition
- To understand the significance of the collection and decide what should be kept by the Society and what should be sent to the Somerset Records Office
- To link with other collections locally and nationally and to train volunteers

**Figure 3. Funding and expenditure**



### How the project operated

Throughout the project, it was managed by a small team established by the Society consisting of its Treasurer (Karen Trigger) who chaired the group, its Chairman (Rachel Thomas CBE), two other Trustees (Caroline Tonson-Rye and Chris Whinney, the latter handing over to Jackie Smith) and the Archivist, Dr Helen Blackman.

The project team met monthly to review progress against the project plan, monitor expenditure against the budget and assess ongoing risks to the project.

The Society's move to its new office on the High Street in Dulverton was central to the project's successful development. Three separate areas to the rear of the ground floor were dedicated to the Archive, creating what the Society now refers to as its Resource Centre.

These areas were:

- Firstly, a work room fitted with a run of flat desks that provided space for volunteers to undertake cataloguing, conservation and data entry and for visitors to view material.
- Secondly, a library area fitted with shelving for books and reports, enabling better cataloguing and access.
- Thirdly, a room at the back of the office, converted to a lockable and environmentally-controlled archive space and fitted with archive-quality shelving.

Key stages in the project are summarised in **Figure 5**. Following the appointment of Dr Helen Blackman, principal phases of work involved recruiting and training the volunteers, transferring the Archive from the Parish Rooms to the High Street offices of the Society, assessing, cataloguing and conserving items in the Archive, starting the electronic capture and storage ('digitisation') of items, and publicising and promoting the Archive. Further information about the discrete tasks involved is provided below.

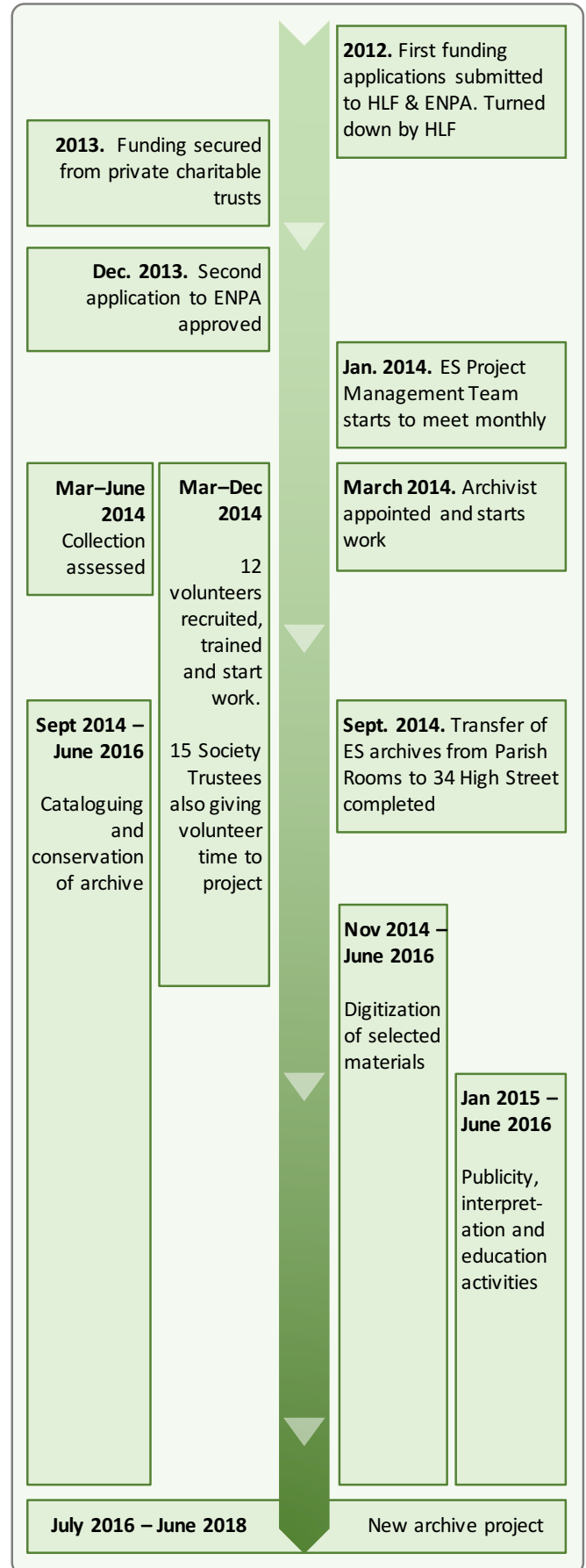
### Assessment

- The full extent of the collection was not known at the start of the project (particularly Hope Bourne's legacy and the collections of photographs taken from the 1950s onwards). The first stage involved taking stock of what the Society held in its Parish Rooms offices and reviewing the different types of cataloguing and storage that had been undertaken by a succession of trustees and volunteers.
- Initial discussions took place with partner organisations such as the National Park Authority, South West Heritage Trust, National Trust, Malcolm McEwan Trust, and local museums to explain and consult them on the project.

### Cataloguing

- A systematic structure for classifying and describing all of the material was developed, based on the International Standards of Archival Description. This uses a hierarchy of classifications starting with Series (e.g. Hope Bourne's collection), then subseries (e.g. Hope Bourne's art), then folders (e.g. art depicting animals), then individual items (e.g. a single sketch).
- Volunteers were trained to systematically classify and describe items, completing up to 15 data fields for each item. This information was initially typed into an Excel spreadsheet (being relatively simple software to use) and, at the end of the project, was transferred to an internet-based database hosted by Community Sites.
- By June 2016, 9,000 separate items held by the Society had been catalogued.

**Figure 5. Project timeline**



## Research

- Research was sometimes needed to establish the origins of material and understand their significance. An undergraduate student from Exeter University, Lucy Maguire, spent a month on the project in July 2015 and she based her dissertation on the Hope Bourne collection.

## Conservation

- The condition of all the material was assessed. Volunteers were trained in simple cleaning such as the removal of surface dust with brushes. A humidified chamber was used to relax badly folded or creased documents before they were flattened. A professional conservator (Caroline Harrison Conservation Ltd) was engaged to restore a number of items that the project team considered of particular interest or value.

## Storage

- As noted above, a room at the back of the Society's new offices at 34 High St was converted into a secure archive room in which temperature and humidity were monitored. Archive-quality shelving, storage boxes and a map chest were purchased. Strict rules were enforced on access to the archive room and the handling of material.

## Digitisation

- Digitisation involves creating a digital copy of documents, avoiding the need for repeated handling of the original material and enabling electronic distribution. The project team agreed that the priority during the project was to digitise the entire run of the Society's annual Review (1959-2015) and the collections of glass plates and the 35mm photographic slides of Exmoor taken by Richard Harper and Roger Miles from the 1950s to the 1980s.
- A specialist company (Imagetek in Honiton) was contracted to digitise most of this material. An A3-sized flat-bed scanner was purchased to enable 'in house' digitising and in future material will be digitised in response to requests from Society members and others. A charge may be applied to recover the costs of providing this service.

## Promotion and publicity

- This important part of the project started when the majority of the cataloguing had been undertaken. The official opening of the Archive took place in March 2015 and attracting good local media coverage. Since then a number of themed displays have been mounted in the front ground floor room in the Society's office. Dr Blackman, often accompanied by trustees and volunteers, took display boards and sometimes a display cabinet to a variety of events including the Exford Show (August 2015), Exmoor Language Garden (November 2015), Moor Words festival (December 2015), Exmoor Archaeology Forum (November 2015), speaking to more than 1,000 people.
- Two A5 booklets were printed and distributed (one on the Hope Bourne Collection and one on the Society's Archive, Library and Resource Centre) and a series of A4 information sheets drawing on the Archive (covering topics such as Exmoor's industrial Heritage, Lorna Doone, Wildlife and Woodlands) were prepared, with over 4,000 copies given out.
- The project was featured in over 38 articles in newspapers and magazines such as the Western Morning News, Country Life, Somerset County Gazette, Devon Life and the Exmoor Magazine. Dr Blackman wrote a regular 500-word column for the North Devon Journal and was interviewed a number of times on local radio.

## Education

- Closely linked to promotion of the Archive, was work with local schools, to include its use in teaching. With advice and support from the NPA education officer, Dr Blackman prepared a teachers' guide to using the Archive and three guides for students on the Society's Resource Centre and Archives (one for Key Stages 1 and 2, one for Key Stage 3 and one for Key Stage 4). At the time of writing, these are being trialled in local Schools.



*Volunteers conserving and preparing documents for storage, February 2016*

## Notable achievements and impacts

There are perhaps four areas in which the project has had the greatest impact. These are in the cataloguing and conservation of records of cultural or historical importance to Exmoor; the creation of free public access to the catalogue through the internet; the training and use of volunteers to do the cataloguing and conservation; and the promotion and educational work that has taken place.

### 1. Key documents catalogued and conserved

The primary impetus for the project was Hope Bourne's legacy to the Society and this has attracted much press and public interest. An unforeseen element of the project, which involved a significant amount of work, arose from the discovery of her manuscript for 'Exmoor Village' which she wrote in 1969, describing Withypool and its parish in the late 1960s. The Society selected illustrations from her archive and published the book in 2014.

Interesting as Hope Bourne's work is, there are other collections in the Archive which probably have wider historical significance. These include the correspondence and papers relating to people such as Victor Bonham-Carter, Malcolm MacEwan and Geoffrey Sinclair, who were nationally or internationally influential in the National Parks movement in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. As noted earlier, events on Exmoor have influenced the direction of national policy on the protection and management of upland landscapes. The Archive preserves, and makes publicly available, a unique contemporary record of these events. It is significant that no other equivalent archive of Exmoor's recent history exists.

The Archive also contains valuable evidence of the story of the ongoing change in Exmoor's landscape. This includes the 35mm slide collections of Richard Harper and Roger Miles and the digital copies of the Exmoor field survey maps from Professor Alice Coleman's land use survey undertaken in 1967 to 1968.

An unusual element of the Archive which may prove of cultural interest is the collection of pamphlets dating from the 1890s onwards. These tended to be written for visitors and privately published, covering traditions and places on Exmoor. Their content and style provide a social record of what people felt was special about Exmoor during that period.

### 2. Provision of public access to the catalogue

During the final stages of the project, the catalogue created by the project was uploaded to the web-based Community Sites database and registered with the National Register of Archives. The searchable database is freely accessible to the public<sup>1</sup>.

The Society will pay an annual fee to Community Sites to provide internet access to the catalogue, ensuring that information about all the 9,000 items currently held on the Society's Archive is freely accessible to anyone who may have an interest in it.

It is not currently the Society's intention to provide internet access to the Archive itself, although the digital copies of the Society's annual Review are held on a Dropbox account which can be made available to members and researchers.

<sup>1</sup> The web address of the Archive database is: <http://www.exmoorsociety.com/content/category/exmoor-society-archive>

### 3. Involvement of volunteers

The extensive use of volunteers to undertake the majority of the cataloguing of items in the Archive was a key feature of the project. The oversight by Trustees on the project team was another source of voluntary input. All these volunteers provided an invaluable resource, reducing the funding needed, and they also leave an important legacy in the knowledge and skills they have developed, which the Society can continue to draw on.

The original intention had been to recruit 26 volunteers for the cataloguing and conservation work. In the event, this number was unnecessarily large and would have required an excessive level of administration by the Project Archivist. There would also have been insufficient space in the Resource Centre for them to work effectively. A more manageable team of 12 volunteers were recruited during the early months of the project.

Most of the volunteers were local residents who had recently retired from paid work and had a personal interest in Exmoor. As one volunteer, Liz Pile, said *"I've lived here since childhood and want to keep Exmoor special"*. By working on the project she felt she had been able to *"make sure history isn't lost and is available to everyone"*.

Many volunteers brought their own skills and experience which added value to their work. For instance, one volunteer had experience of maintaining a web-based database in the National Health Service. This proved helpful during the transfer of the catalogue to the Community Sites database.

All of the volunteers received half a day's initial training on the handling and care of archive items and on how to catalogue and describe them. The training programme designed by the Project Archivist, which is written up and held by the Society, is a useful legacy of the project.

The time spent by volunteers was counted as an in-kind contribution to project costs and helped to draw down external funding from the National Park Authority's Partnership Fund. A target was set at the start of the project for 4,780 hours of volunteer time to be committed, with a value of £149,000 (based on the hourly rates approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund) which was equivalent to 59% of the total project cost. In the event, this target was comfortably exceeded. Overall, the team of volunteers catalogued over 5,000 items in the Archive.

### 4. Promotion and education

The level of media and public interest in the Archive exceeded the expectations of the project team. Events such as the discovery of Hope Bourne's 'Exmoor Village' manuscript was picked up widely (for instance being covered on the BBC's Devon and Somerset local news web pages). As noted above, the Archivist committed significant time to promoting the project at events and talks and through a column in the North Devon Journal.

One particularly notable event was the 'Exmoor Language Garden' held in Dulverton in November 2015, organised by the Society and linguistics researcher Vicky Garnett. The event celebrated the language and dialect of Exmoor and involved children from Minehead First School and Dulverton Middle School.

As noted earlier, the project has prepared a series of educational guides for teachers and students of different ages showing how the Archive can be used to study Exmoor's people, industry, nature, art and literature, and other topics. It remains to be seen how these guides will fit with the educational needs and resources of local schools. In order to be successful, they are likely to need continuing promotion and development.

A growing number of people have started to use the catalogue and, through it, the Archive. This number will grow significantly now that the catalogue is available online. A measure of the value that visitors to the Society's office place on this can be assessed from comments in the visitor's book. These include *"Very helpful resource. We leave a little wiser"* and *"Huge improvement on the old premises"*. A researcher from Bristol University commented *"A wonderfully productive day spent at what is a necessary resource for Exmoor. It will prove to be a key resource, no doubt, for my current project and I look forward to returning before long"*.

### Overall assessment of achievements

**In summary, the project has secured the future of a unique archive covering the recent history of Exmoor, including nationally significant papers relating to the development of National Parks. It has shown how high standards of cataloguing and storage can be achieved by a charitable body combining the skills of a professional archivist with the enthusiasm of local volunteers. And it has raised the interest of local communities in their heritage.**



## The ongoing legacy of the project

This final section of the report looks forward briefly to the Society's new archive project.

The project plan for this runs from July 2016 to June 2018. It seeks to realise the Archive's potential by facilitating a better understanding of Exmoor's Special Qualities through knowledge of its past and present. It will do this in two ways.

**Firstly**, the Society will act as a hub to local history and archive groups providing guidance, training and practical assistance, and offering the option to include these local archives within the Society's catalogue. This will give communities ownership and better understanding of their history.

**Secondly**, the Society will draw on its Archive to prepare and publish information that increases public understanding of Exmoor's special qualities. This will include:

- Launching 'Exmoor Studies', a series of shorter books inspired by the Exmoor Review;
- the use of volunteers to prepare a set of "then and now" photographs of Exmoor's landscape;

- a conference on 'Exmoor as English Outback' – a place for exploration, slightly beyond the usual scope of civilisation and the law; and
- preparation of a book-length history of the National Park in time for the Society's 60th anniversary in 2018.

The Society is seeking the necessary funding to employ its Outreach Archivist and undertake these activities. At the time of writing, most of this funding has been secured.

There are two important issues about the scope of the Archive that will need to be addressed in this next phase. These are the extent to which the Society should accept material that is not directly relevant to Exmoor, and the extent to which the Archive should hold copies of original material about Exmoor that is held by others. An Archive Collections Policy has been prepared for the approval of Trustees that will determine the Society's policy on these issues.



*The archive store (left) and library (right) form the core of the Resource Centre in the Society's High Street offices. July 2016*