

PRESS RELEASE: 60 Years of Protecting and Conserving Exmoor for All

Celebrating 60 years as a charity protecting and conserving Exmoor, The Exmoor Society, at its recent AGM, focused on how the activities of its early years set the direction it follows today. It started by campaigning over moorland loss through afforestation and ploughing and fencing, providing evidence of the rate of loss since 1954 when Exmoor was designated a national park, mainly for its large areas of moorland. At the same time, the Society began many other activities such as publishing the annual *Exmoor Review*, now in its 59th edition, setting up an archive of letters, papers, maps and photographs, and a library of Exmoor books, now properly catalogued in its Dulverton Resource Centre. From its foundation, the Society also supported other bodies, for example, appealing for funds to buy land at Heddon's Mouth for the National Trust and starting the Lynton and Exmoor Museum. It was also concerned about the local community's wellbeing by drawing attention to the problems of young people and through a youth newsletter *Upover Exmoor*. The AGM also heard about early campaigners such as John Coleman Cooke, John Goodland, Malcolm MacEwen and Victor Bonham-Carter.

'This rich legacy from our early years of campaigning, raising awareness of Exmoor's special qualities and researching and monitoring change continues today,' said Rachel Thomas, Chairman. 'In the C21, we both celebrate and raise the big issues in relation to national park purposes set up for the benefit of the nation. Some examples include integrating Exmoor's landscape character with farming and its wider role in the community, encouraging rural land-based business opportunities for young people, and enjoying the moor through walking, riding and cycling. Recently, the Society's commissioned report 'Towards a Register of Exmoor's Natural Capital', breaks new ground in understanding a deceptively simple concept that is now forming the basis of environmental policy development. The Register, an important first step, pushes out the boundaries of conservation-thinking in relation to nature, landscape, heritage and people's wellbeing and demonstrates how the Society continues to support Exmoor's future as a special place in a fast-changing world.'

The Chairman paid tribute to Dr Helen Blackman, the first full-time member of staff who, over the last four years as its outreach archivist, has catalogued the Society's varied material, trained volunteers, started a new series of Exmoor Studies and encouraged people to use the archives. With the completion of two archive projects, Helen has left the Society with an excellent Resource Centre to be run by volunteers.

Awards and competition winners were presented by the President, Sir Antony Acland – Founder's Award to Toni Jones for her philanthropy, Brian & Mary Chugg

Conservation Award to Robert Deane of Rural Focus Ltd, Pinnacle Youth Award to Camilla Waterer, Philip Stephens and Polly Goodman. The winner of the adult poetry competition, Pat Glover, read her moving poem 'Old Ruddock's Boy Done Good, they say, Up Country', now on the Society's website. At the end of the crowded day, in the tradition of recognising significant occasions, the President celebrated the charity's 60 years by cutting a birthday cake.

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Images: **ExSo@60 – 1:** Group (from l-r) Sir Antony Acland, Camilla Waterer, Toni Jones, Robert Deane, Rachel Thomas, Philip Stephens, Polly Goodman
ExSo@60 – 3a: Sir Antony Acland and Dr Helen Blackman cut the cake

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