

PRESS RELEASE: 100th anniversary of Hope Bourne's birth

Sunday 26 August 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Exmoor writer and artist Hope Lilian Bourne. To celebrate this, the Exmoor Society has just published a short anthology of her lesser-known writings, illustrated with her artwork.

Hope was born in Oxford in 1918 and spent much of her childhood in Hartland, Devon where her mother was the headmistress of a village school, moving to the Cotswolds in 1939. When the death of her mother led to the sale of their house to pay debts, Hope was left with no home, qualifications or income, and decided to return to Exmoor to live on and with the land, in a manner as self-sufficient and self-reliant as possible. She lived for many years in a simple caravan at Ferny Ball, a deserted farmstead near Withypool with no services or conventional comforts. Here she cultivated her garden and her natural talent as a painter and writer.

Hope gained some national attention in the late 1970s and 1980s with a series of newspaper interviews and television programmes and, on the whole, these portrayed her as a noble figure living a romantic wild life. However, she was at pains to tell friends that this was not the case and that her lifestyle was far from reclusive and also more forced upon her by circumstance than a matter of her choosing. This volume seeks to redress the balance, using Hope's own words to illustrate how she lived and what was important to her.

The editor, Lisa Eden, said: 'I have selected pieces which show Hope revelling in Exmoor's storms and silences, and in the drama of raging seas at Hartland. Hope pays tribute to friendship – both human and animal – with a touching obituary of Mary Richards and a charming requiem for her favourite bantam. She had a justified pride in living harmoniously with her environment, as letters to local newspapers show; and her eloquent denunciation of the unfairness of the Poll Tax reveals her formidable skills as a protester. A piece that has much resonance today is her dream of re-wilding Exmoor: she imagines it restocked with aurochs, wild boar and wolves, presenting a real challenge and adventure for walkers and campers!'

When Hope died in 2010, she left her estate to the Exmoor Society, having been a member since 1959. Given how frugal her lifestyle was, she left a fairly substantial legacy which in part enabled the Society to move into larger premises in Dulverton and open a Resource Centre, including specialist storage for the Society's archive collection. This includes Hope's artwork, writings, journals and correspondence. These were jumbled and scattered throughout her bungalow in Withypool and sorting through them proved a difficult task for the archivist and the Society's volunteers!

The Society is delighted with this book, entitled Hope Bourne's Reflections in Words. It is available for sale in the Society's headquarters in Dulverton, price £6, and is number four in a series of Exmoor Studies. The first three are Exmoor Chroniclers, The Exmoor Pony: Contested Histories and The Minehead Road: Between Exmoor and the Quantocks.

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Images: HB Reflections.jpg – Exmoor Study Front Cover
p-01.jpg - Hope Bourne in her garden, photographer unknown

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Note to Editors:

The Exmoor Society exists to promote and organise action for the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of Exmoor national park. It was established in 1958 and successfully fought proposals to afforest The Chains, the central moorland area of Exmoor. It has continued to campaign against adverse changes and encourage people's understanding of the park's special qualities. It acts as an independent watchdog and champion for Exmoor's status as a national park.

