



The Exmoor Society
Registered Charity No 1160912



2015 – 2016

President:

Sir Antony Acland KG

Vice- Presidents:

Mr Rodney Coyne
Lady Elizabeth Gass DCVO JP
Mr Stanley Johnson
Lord King of Bridgwater, CH PC

Baroness Mallalieu, QC
Sir Stephen Waley-Cohen Bt
Mr Christopher Whinney

Trustees:

Officers: **Chairman:** Mrs Rachel Thomas, CBE, DL
 Vice-Chairman: Dr Duncan Jeffray
 Hon. Treasurer: Mrs Karen Trigger, FCA

Executive Committee:

Mrs Arabella Amory, Tiverton
Mr Christopher Beatson-Hird, Skilgate
Mr Chris Binnie, Wootton Courtenay
Mr Michael Hankin, Minehead
Dr Keith Howe, Exeter
Mrs Toni Jones, Dulverton
Mr Christopher Norrish, Clevedon

Miss Jackie Smith, Brompton Regis
Mr Mike Taylor OBE, Alcester
Miss Caroline Tonson-Rye, Dulverton
Mr Roger Watts, Dulverton
Prof John Wibberley, Shaldon
Mrs Christina Williams, Molland

Staff:

Society Administrator: Anne Parham
Outreach Archivist: Dr Helen Blackman

Hon. Solicitor: Mr Tim Howells, Pardoes
Editor of the Exmoor Review: Frances Nicholson

Office:

34 High Street, Dulverton, Somerset TA22 9DJ
Tel: 01398 323335
E-mail: info@exmoorsociety.com
Web site: www.exmoorsociety.com

Office Hours: Weekdays 10am to 4pm

CONTENTS

3	Chairman's Comments 2016
5	Planning
6	State of the Park
7	Moorland News <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Exmoor Society's Moorland Report Update▪ Exmoor Moorland Landscape Project 2010-2015▪ Grazing the Moor▪ Exmoor Mires Partnership 2015-2020▪ Moorland Birds
12	Archive News <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Exmoor Language Garden▪ New Project – Understanding Exmoor's Special Qualities
15	Awards and Competitions
21	New Trustees
22	Diary Dates for Exmoor Festivals
23	Exmoor Society Walks Programme
25	News from the Groups

**The Exmoor Society / ENPA
SPRING CONFERENCE 2016
Friday, 22 April 2016**

Dulverton Town Hall ~ 10am

'Exmoor's Future Landscapes'

£20 per person to include refreshments

Booking essential: Please complete form included with this newsletter, and return to 34 High Street, Dulverton TA22 9DJ with your cheque payable to "The Exmoor Society".

Join the debate!

Chairman's Comments

In my report to the AGM in September, I painted a gloomy picture about the unprecedented times facing National Parks. Although loved and supported by the general public, National Parks appeared to have slipped down the political agenda with deep cuts to National Park Authorities, changes in planning policy and a misunderstanding of their role compared with Local Authorities. But there is some good news. It is pleasing to note that the Government has confirmed the extension of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales boundaries to include special landscapes needing special protection provided by National Park status. For Exmoor, it now might be worth raising interest again on extending its boundaries which were drawn so closely to the moorland line and dividing it from moorland villages and parishes and other similar landscape types such as woodland and farmed land.

The second piece of good news, is that National Park funding is to be protected in real terms and the Authorities will not face further deep cuts to their budgets over the life of this parliament.

At the same time, the NPAs will be given legal flexibilities to allow them to build long-term revenue streams and boost growth in rural areas. The hope is that the emphasis for Exmoor will be on building the growth of high-quality food products, landscape enhancement, visitor economy, green business, recreation and wildlife. In other words, to make greater use of Exmoor's natural and cultural assets.

However, other issues come to the fore, particularly, the debate over the use of the Uplands, which continues to rage. This includes calls for re-wilding, for removing livestock from moorland, increasing biodiversity, water and carbon storage as well as managing outstanding landscapes such as moorland by hill-farming activities that have been practised for centuries. It is therefore opportune that the Society has commissioned an update of the seminal report Moorlands at a Crossroads, and its recommendations will be part of this year's Spring Conference. It should be a lively affair, as there are very strong views held along the spectrum of what is meant by re-wilding. Stanley Johnson, a Society Vice President responsible for writing the EU Habitats Directive, has agreed to speak at the conference, titled: 'Exmoor's Future Landscapes'.

The very successful two-year archive project will come to an end in June and the Society is putting together a new project to continue to employ Dr Helen Blackman through further unlocking the potential within the archives to help protect Exmoor's special qualities. The progress Helen has made with cataloguing, digitising, training volunteers and outreach work has been

outstanding. The Society is launching an appeal to help fund this new phase; please see the enclosed form. An online catalogue of the archives will be available on the launch of our re-designed website in the Spring.

The Society is looking forward to an interesting and positive year for Exmoor in 2016.



© Jennifer Rowlandson

Planning

2016 has been a relatively quiet year for planning applications. The number submitted – 310 - was 17.5 per cent less than last year, largely because of fewer applications in the first half of the year.

In many ways it has been a strange year as we are still working to the Old Local Plan which contains all the policies guiding planning decisions. The new plan, which is will run from 2011 to 2031, is still in preparation. This strange situation is that the Old Plan becomes less and less relevant as time goes by, particularly as central government has made so many major changes with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework. The emerging policies in the new plan loom increasingly over the planning process, but cannot take full effect until it has been formally approved. This strange 'Alice in Wonderland' situation, though not desirable, seems to be the normal process for all planning authorities. Let us hope that we see the new plan in place this year. The draft plan is significantly different in tone and detail to the existing one and will take time to bed-in as Planning Officers, Members and the general public become familiar with the new policies.

The number of applications for large agricultural buildings, located away from the farmsteads, has decreased reducing the damaging impact on landscape.

Whilst applications continue to be submitted they have generally been the smaller buildings in more appropriate locations.

The application which caused most concern to the Executive Committee was for a 30-metre high mobile phone mast in an exposed moorland location on Haddon Hill. The application was rushed through as government funding for such schemes is to be withdrawn. We were concerned that the applicant had not been required to submit a full landscape impact assessment and that the Park's own assessment appeared just before the meeting. The Society submitted its comments concentrating on the damage to the landscape. Significantly, the officers made no recommendation leaving the decision to Members. Although permission was granted on the grounds that the public benefit outweighed the landscape damage, the applicant has indicated that it is unlikely to be able construct the mast in time to receive the funding.

An application which we have been anticipating, since mid-summer, is the most significant one to be considered by the Authority for many years. This is for the extension of the Barnstaple-Lynton Railway from its existing location to the Park boundary at Blackmoor Gate and beyond. The Society has been kept well informed and had a presentation earlier in the year. Whilst we feel that the reopening of the line itself is acceptable in landscape terms, we wait to see the final details of the developments at Blackmoor Gate, in particular the creation of new and extended car parking areas just inside the Park and outside it. The application is made more complex as two planning authorities are involved; Exmoor National Park and North Devon. We understand that a huge environmental impact assessment has been prepared which the Society looks forward to receiving soon.

STATE OF THE PARK 2016

In preparation for the ENPA's statutory Management Plan (Partnership Plan) 2017-2022, evidence is being collected for the State of the Park 2016 and is based on Exmoor's ten special qualities.

Exmoor and Dartmoor's Economic Potential

Exmoor and Dartmoor's National Park Authorities have teamed up to show how both bodies are supporting the economic growth of their rural communities. Four key areas have been identified:

1. Improving connectivity – through superfast broadband, improved mobile coverage and rail and road infrastructure;
2. Promoting people and place through the value of the National Park for local supply chains, quality branding and distinctive products;
3. Supporting key sectors, such as farming, food and tourism, by investing in development of skills and productivity, making connections between them;
4. Sustaining the resources by investing in managing the environment, access to it and its promotion.

By working together, the two National Parks make a bigger contribution to economic growth and show how this helps release the potential of small rural communities.

Moorland News

The Exmoor Society's Moorland Report Update

It is now over ten years since the Society published the *Moorlands at a Crossroads* report as a contribution to the 50th anniversary of the designation of Exmoor as a National Park. The report identified that the special qualities of the moorland, which had been the primary reason for the designation, were undervalued and in fragile condition. It highlighted that most disagreements between different interests were over land management practices and that there was a need to reach a consensus.

In October 2015, The Exmoor Society commissioned Robert Deane, the original author of the report, to undertake an update on two aspects. First, to look back on the achievements since 2004 and the key triggers of change that have affected the moorland's special qualities. Second, to look forward to the challenges and need for action over the next ten years, identifying priorities for future policies and projects to safeguard the special qualities.

The report, and its recommendations, will be presented at this year's annual Spring Conference, with the theme being 'Exmoor's Future Landscapes'. This is a pertinent time to consider the future for moorlands with the many outside forces triggering change, not least the vote over staying in Europe.

Exmoor is likely to be at the cutting edge of the debate about the value placed on our moorland landscapes and it needs to set the vision for the future.



Exmoor Moorland Landscape Project 2010-2015

The Exmoor Moorland Landscape Project funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund, the ENPA and others, ended in December 2015. The *Moorlands at a Crossroads* report was the base document on which the scheme was developed. The scheme has championed the Park's moorland landscape for the last five years and involved a range of people from all walks of life – farmers, tourists, local businesses, ecologists, students and the retired. Projects undertaken have included major and minor landscape improvements, apprenticeships, moor-keepers, moorland classroom and archaeological digs. Called the Heart of Exmoor, the scheme was a partnership of 12 organisations and was chaired by Arabella Amory, an Exmoor Society trustee, and driven by project staff. The legacy now needs to be embedded in the different organisations that formed the partnership.

Grazing the Moor Project

Grazing the Moor project has attracted a great deal of interest in the media. Christina Williams, who won our prestigious 2015 Samuel Foss Conservation Award and whose family own Molland Moor, has driven the project, set up by the Molland Estate and Heather Trust, with the help of the ENPA Partnership Fund and others. It is monitoring the impact of changes to the grazing regime including the introduction of winter grazing by cattle on the moor. The hope is it will show that balanced winter grazing can provide a fightback against the explosion of gorse, bracken and Molinia grasses that is threatening the moor's character. On receiving the award, Christina said: '25 years' ago, Molland Moor was in good shape with healthy heather growth. Now we are battling with Molinia grasses, gorse and lack of heather but are committed to returning the moor to its former glorious state.'

Vegetation on Dunkery Common

Dunkery is the highest hill on Exmoor at 519 metres. It is covered in heather, which is an important habitat. The landowner, the National Trust, swales each year. However Natural England has imposed restrictions on the maximum single area that can be burnt and has also imposed restrictions on the period when swaling – burning - may take place. Since swaling has to be done when the ground is relatively dry this can restrict it to only a few days a year. As a result, the heather generally has become old and leggy. At the same time, lower sale prices of lamb and the requirement to check the stock every day, stocking of the moor has become uneconomic and has generally ceased.

Over the years, despite several hundred wild red deer on and around Dunkery, the Common has not been sufficiently grazed or burnt and now gorse and bracken has intruded and become widespread.

Under the Commons Registration Act, all farmers who had stocked the moor historically could register their rights. There are now a dozen commoners, covering about 750 ha of mainly the southern and eastern parts of Dunkery. These have now formed the Dunkery Commoners Association.

The tenant farmers of the agricultural land of the Holnicote Estate have joined together to form the Dunkery Tenants Association, to manage their grazing rights over a similar area to the north and west of Dunkery. As part of the government's Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme administered by Natural England, the Commoners have sprayed significant areas of bracken to reduce it. The Commoners and the Tenants are now under the HLS again stocking Dunkery with cattle, sheep and ponies to control the vegetation. So, for example, a good-looking herd of the tenants' Highland cattle can now be seen, generally on Wilmersham Common, as can another herd of Commoners' cattle, during the summer in the Hanny combe area.

Sheep can often be seen in Langcombe and near Woodcock gardens. Exmoor ponies can be found on Stoke Pero Common and Greenwells Bog. Thus the stocking of the moor has resulted in increased tourist interest, particularly in the Exmoor pony.

Although the Tenants and Commoners have certain stock allocations, there is no fence between the two areas and the two groups liaise when stock cross the boundary, as when some of the Highland cattle turned up at Brockwell Farm on in-bye land. Hopefully, with the increased stocking, over the years ahead Dunkery will return to a more favourable habitat for the benefit of all.

Exmoor Mires Partnership 2015-2020

A new phase of the Mires Project, funded by SW Water, began in 2015. By blocking up drainage ditches, moorland can hold more water and release it more slowly, potentially reducing flooding elsewhere and improving summer flows and water quality. The 2,000 hectares of restored moorland has been closely monitored by Exeter University, who have installed state-of-the-art equipment, which relays data from over 200 monitoring points on the moorland every 15 minutes to record changes in water table levels. The

equipment also monitors water quality and greenhouse gas releases from the peat. So far, results indicate the amount of storm water running off the moorland has been reduced with a rise in the water table of up to 2.65 cms as a result of ditch-blocking.

With a new phase, monitoring will continue, plus other important research work including data collection on vegetation changes, invertebrate surveys and archaeology. A book by Lee Bray called *The Past and The Peat – Archaeological and Peatland Restoration on Exmoor* provides an insight into how the Mires Project is furthering knowledge of moorland archaeology.

Moorland Birds

In 2014, the RSPB, with funding from the Exmoor National Park Partnership Fund, Natural England and the Exmoor Mires Project, undertook a moorland breeding bird survey. This was the latest in a series of periodic surveys that have been undertaken since the late 1970s to provide an insight into the numbers, distribution and trends of Exmoor's moorland birds. It also tells us how important Exmoor is in a wider context and how birds are faring on Exmoor compared to elsewhere. The two most recent surveys, in 2014 and 2008 collected broad habitat information that can help us understand how changes in the moorland habitat can affect its bird populations. Further repeats of the survey in future will add to the usefulness of this information.



The survey looked at 27 target species which occupy the moorland, from the very numerous and widespread to the much more restricted. Overall, 14 of the 27 species showed increases, with nine showing decreases.

The results showed a mixed picture, but a generally positive one, with more species increasing than declining. Several species that have shown increases are declining nationally and are high conservation priorities, therefore increasing the relative importance of Exmoor for those species. For example, skylark, linnet, lesser redpoll, yellowhammer and cuckoo are all listed on the UK Birds of Conservation Concern 'Red list' but have all shown recent increases on Exmoor. These species occupy a range of habitats within Exmoor's moorland. Some, such as skylarks, prefer shorter vegetation and occupy the open hilltops; meadow pipits occupy heather and grass moorland, whereas as linnet, lesser redpoll and yellowhammer are associated with gorse of varying heights and density and tend to occupy valleys or, in the case of yellowhammer, the moorland edge. Combined with areas of wetter habitat and areas of scattered trees and woodland edge, which each support different species again, it is the availability of all these different moorland habitat types that makes Exmoor so important.

Conversely, there are species that are in trouble. For example, curlews continue to decline on Exmoor and the species has also recently been added to the UK red list, following steep declines across the country. The future of curlews on Exmoor is uncertain. Kestrels have also shown a decline at both the Exmoor and national level. Dartford warblers have declined following cold winters a few years ago, but are starting to recover following milder years and maintenance of good heathland and gorse habitat.

While Exmoor has few true upland bird species, having lost ring ouzels as a breeding bird over a decade ago, it is an important place for a range of birds that were once more common in the wider countryside, including birds that are now becoming increasingly confined to upland areas. Whinchat and cuckoo are examples of this, where the Exmoor populations are stable and increasing respectively, but they are both now largely absent from much of our wider countryside.

Birds face many threats so the maintenance, and where necessary, enhancement of the suite of habitats Exmoor offers will help safeguard its bird populations into the future.

Helen Booker, Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB SW Region, January 2016

Archive News

It has been a busy year in the archives, and it's hard to believe we are coming up to the end of our two-year project! We've seen new material arriving – including Tom Troake's slides of Exmoor from his days in the Dulverton Camera Club, and some much older house deeds from a property near Exford. Dr Blackman has given talks to the Porlock and Barnstaple groups; Bridgetown Ladies Group; Bratton Fleming Local History Group; Minehead Conservation Society and the Exmoor Natural History Society, amongst others. She has also been helping the Winsford Archive group, giving advice on how they might start to conserve and catalogue the material they are taking in.

Funding for the archive project has enabled the Society to purchase a museum cabinet. This has been used to host several displays, which are changed every 6-8 weeks. Each display concentrates on a different topic which can be researched using material in the archives. For example, one of the first exhibitions, on "Wildlife on Exmoor", showed how the moor has inspired authors such as Henry Williamson; George Whyte-Melville and J.W. Fortescue to write about otters, horses and red deer. The display on industry aimed to show that Exmoor, rather than being completely wild, has been shaped by human activity including mining and transport networks. Autumn saw an exhibition on woodlands, which was well-covered in the local press. Until mid-March we have a display of material relating to Lorna Doone. This will then be changed and the focus will turn to moorlands, in time for the Spring Conference.

During the summer we took on a student intern, with funding from the Malcolm MacEwen Trust. Lucy Maguire, an undergraduate studying English Literature at Exeter University, joined us for 5 weeks in August and September and managed to catalogue around 1500 of Hope Bourne's pictures! This has greatly improved our ability to find particular pieces of Bourne's artwork, which is of much local interest. The Society has also been advised by a professional conservator, as some of the artwork was damaged and has complex preservation needs. And, of course, September 2015 saw the publication of Hope Bourne's Exmoor Village.

Dr Blackman maintains links with the Society's partners and in November she spoke at the ENPA's Archaeology Forum. Continuing publicity for the archives has seen more researchers coming in to use the Resource Centre and we are always happy to receive inquiries about Exmoor and its history.

Exmoor Language Garden

In November 2015 the Exmoor Society and linguistics researcher Vicky Garnett hosted a new event, the Exmoor Language Garden. This included talks and performances from publisher and historian Steven Pugsley; folk singers Tom and Barbara Brown; author Victoria Eveleigh and retired farmer Tony Takle. The difficulties faced by rare languages and dialects as they try to survive are very similar to the environmental threats faced by many rare and vulnerable plants, hence the extended metaphor of a language garden.

The event was a celebration of language on the moor. It was well-received and journalist Martin Hesp had WMN readers guessing the meaning of oddmedods; leathern birds; clammers and appledranes! (Snails; bats; footbridges and the buzzing of a wasp in an apple). The ELG was a good opportunity for collaboration with local schools and it was great to see teachers from Dulverton Middle School in attendance, with work undertaken by their pupils.



Steven Pugsley gave examples of dialect words on Exmoor and discussed how many of these were older words, some for example used by Chaucer in the fourteenth century, which had persisted in the region. This raised interesting questions about the moor's geographical isolation. As Tom Brown

argued “mazed”, as in to be confused as if trapped in a maze, persists in both Exmoor and in the north west. Thus there is evidence in both places of older forms persisting when they have died out elsewhere. Steven’s talk was followed by Tony’s poetry reading, showing us dialect in action! There followed a fruitful discussion of Devon and Somerset dialect, including “back along” and “dreckly” which can mean anytime between now (“directly”) and some unspecified future date, possibly never.

Dr Blackman then gave a brief talk on the Exmoor Society’s archives, illustrated with maps, books, photographs and original artwork. She explained the processes involved in digital reconstruction of damaged archive material and said that the Society could give advice on how to store archives to help prevent such damage. The afternoon then switched to something completely different as Tom and Barbara gave a fascinating performance of Devon and Somerset folk songs including the much-loved “Outstepped mother and me”. The final talk was by Victoria Eveleigh. She argued that her main character, Katy Squires, has a sense of belonging within her community and landscape. In fact, Victoria argued, the landscape is not separate from that community but the two are intertwined in ways that are obvious to locals but perhaps less apparent to visitors who pass through. Victoria uses very few dialect terms in her published works, to make them more accessible to a wider audience, but they do have a very definite sense of Exmoor as a place and community. The Exmoor Society feels that now is the time to capture these dialect terms as they recede from living memory.

New Project – Understanding Exmoor’s Special Qualities

Our current archive project ‘Unlocking Exmoor’s Heritage’ has been an enormous success and so we are seeking to raise funds to start another project which will use the rich resources we have discovered. The overall aim will be to demonstrate how archives can be used to facilitate an understanding of Exmoor’s special qualities, past and present. We would like to start this work in July if we are successful in our fundraising.

An appeal has been launched, details of which can be found on the enclosed form. If you would like further details of our plans, please contact us.

Awards & Competitions

Lucy Perry Literary Competition 2015

The Lucy Perry Literary Competition is open to young people between the ages of 8 and 14 years of age, divided into two groups offering three prizes for a piece of poetry or prose inspired by Exmoor – its landscape, fauna, flora or cultural heritage and people's enjoyment of it. 2015 results were as follows:

	Junior	Senior
1st	Henry Carless	Daisy Jefferies
2nd	Rebecca Hassall	Emma Rawicz-Szczerbo
3rd	Isobel Harris	Heather Holloway

Alfred Vowles Photographic Competition 2016

The competition was well-supported with a total of 85 entries. The judges considered the quality to be excellent, and also impressed by the variety of subject matter. Many of the photographs portrayed traditional Exmoor views with a freshness that captured a real sense of the area. Results of the three categories:

Heritage:



*Winner: Conygar Tower
– Jenny Gibson*



*Highly Commended: Tom Lock of
Hawkridge, 2015 – Jenny Gibson*

Scenery:



Winner: Oare Church in the snow – Madeline Taylor



*Highly Commended: Exmoor in Winter
- Madeline Taylor*

Wildlife:



Highly Commended: Stag taken between Dunkery Beacon & Cloutsham – Roger Parsons



Winner: Please tickle my chin – K W Hann
**AND OVERALL WINNER OF THE
ALFRED VOWLES MEMORIAL TROPHY 2016**

The Pinnacle Award 2015

The Exmoor Society's acclaimed Pinnacle Award, worth £3,000, was won by an aspiring tree surgeon from West Somerset. Matthew Sharp has set a business in woodland management with the specific intention of using small equipment. Fully aware of the damage caused by large machinery, he has decided to concentrate on using small machinery that can operate within woodland and other environmentally sensitive areas without disturbing the habitat and landscape. He is putting the prize money towards the cost of a HIAB crane trailer for use with an ATV which will enable him to manoeuvre between trees when extracting and hauling timber.



2015 Pinnacle Award winner Matthew Sharp

Samuel Foss Conservation Award 2015

The 2015 prestigious Samuel Foss Conservation Award by The Exmoor Society has been won by Christina Williams, whose family own Molland Moor. Through the drive and determination of Christina, a five-year project called 'Grazing the Moor' has been set up with the Molland Estate, the Heather Trust and other partners to monitor the impact of changes to the grazing regime, including the introduction of winter grazing by cattle on the moor. The hope is that, through the experiment, winter grazing will begin a long-awaited fight-back against the explosion of gorse, bracken and Molinia grass that is threatening the moor's character.



Christina Williams (right) with Baroness Ann Mallalieu

©Tony Gibson

On receiving the Award, Christina said: '25 years ago Molland Moor was in good shape with healthy heather growth. Now we are battling with the Molinia grasses and gorse and lack of heather but we are committed to returning the moor to its former glorious state!'

Founder's Award 2015

Kindly sponsored by Steven Pugsley and Halsgrove Publishing, the 2015 Founder's Award was presented to Jenny Gibson for her contribution to The Exmoor Society, both as a member and volunteer. Jenny has supported the



Jenny Gibson (right) with Baroness Ann Mallalieu

©Tony Gibson

Society in a range of roles including researching and leading walks and as Assistant Editor of The Exmoor Review. Her talents are many and varied and we are enormously fortunate and grateful to Jenny for sharing them.



© Jennifer Rowlandson

New Trustees

Following their election at the AGM, we are very pleased to welcome three new trustees on to the Executive Board. Each one brings a new perspective that will enhance the Society's ability to help protect Exmoor for future generations.

Christopher Beatson-Hird

Christopher has lived in Somerset for the last twenty five years, currently on the eastern boundary of the Park, near Upton. He has farmed on Exmoor for a number of years, both sheep and cattle, and thus has a good understanding of agricultural practice.



Christopher is an Oxford law graduate who has had a successful career initially in banking and later setting up and running his own businesses. In his early sixties, he's an avid walker and an enthusiastic fisherman. Now retired, he sits on various local and

London-based boards.

Prof John Wibberley

John Wibberley graduated from the University of Reading, UK, in agriculture where he subsequently obtained his Masters (MSc & MA) and Doctorate. He was awarded Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society (FRGS) in 2010 for his work in commercial and field geography related to international agriculture and rural development. He is a Professor of Comparative Agriculture & Rural Extension, and an independent Resource Management Consultant working in the UK and overseas, especially in Africa.



A Secretary of State Appointee on Exmoor National Park Authority since 2008, he also chaired The Exmoor Hill Farm Project 2009-13 which developed the ongoing Exmoor Hill Farming Network. A nominated member of the Royal Agricultural Society of England Council

since 2005, John also serves on the National Trust Council, on several other committees and Trusts, and is an Advisor to various organisations

Roger Watts

Roger has local roots; he is descended from the Watts family who inhabited the area between North Molton and Simonsbath - perhaps back to the Tudor period. An immediate ancestor, James Watts, is recorded in the 1841 census at Simonsbath, working for the Knights. James' son, John, left Exmoor in the 1840s to go to South Wales....and it has taken Roger some 170 years to get back!



Returning to Exmoor from a career in the Treasury to live in Dulverton, Roger finds himself apprehensive about the threats posed to Exmoor by the pressures of population, traffic and all the other impacts of the modern world. His background is primarily in analysing issues and

working up options. But he also has an interest in the history of Exmoor and its cultural heritage, and in bringing back to life stories of Exmoor's past.

Diary Dates for Exmoor Festivals

Simonsbath Festival 2016

Monday 2 May 2016 – Friday 24 June 2016

Full details of the programme are available on the website www.simonsbathfestival.org.uk and you can follow the festival on Facebook and Twitter. Alternatively, email info@simonsbathfestival.org.uk or call 01643 831343.

Porlock Arts Festival

Events throughout the year. Details available on the website www.porlockfestival.org

The Two Moors Festival

October 2016

Full details are available on the website www.thetwomoorsfestival.co.uk

Walks Programme

The 2015 programme ended on a high in October '15 with 25 walkers joining the 'Autumnal Woods around Dulverton followed by an optional visit to the Society archives'. This was at the end of a year which offered 26 guided walks covering diverse areas and subjects. Some focussed on the landscape and attracted walkers wanting to discover a new area with the benefit of a guide or to join in the company of other walkers. Other walks focused on figures from the arts, for example 'In the Footsteps of Rachel Reckitt, Engraver, Sculptor and Welder' and literature 'Lorna Doone – Fact and Fiction'. Walks such 'Birdsong around Selworthy and Bossington', 'A Stroll through the History and Landscape of Simonsbath' and 'About the Trees of Exmoor' offered specialist subjects.

One walk even saw a brave swimmer take to the waters of Woody Bay!

The Society is now the main provider of guided walks on Exmoor. We are most grateful to the walk leaders who offer so much of their time and are willing to share their love and knowledge of Exmoor for the enjoyment of others and for the benefit of the Society.



Watersmeet & East Lyn River Walk 2015 © Jennifer Rowlandson

In 2016, three of our walk leaders will be unable to lead again and we express our thanks to Wendy, Ken and Saffron. We are pleased to welcome back Roy Cowdrill and our new leaders, Anna Morris and Mike Collyer.

The 2016 programme offers 26 walks – some are back by popular demand, including the Historic Tours of Lynton and Valley of Rocks, Rachel Reckitt, Watersmeet and the East Lyn and Far West Exmoor. New walks include ‘Avill Valley Vistas’ where walkers will enjoy stunning views across the Bristol Channel and South Wales, ‘In Coleridge’s Footsteps to Culbone’ and ‘Lady Harriet Acland’s Drive at Haddon Hill’. The programme is backed by research material from the archives, both written and photographs, which the leaders can use to illustrate their walks and talks.

Do come along and join in. Enjoy the company of others, perhaps learn something new - and all this in the stunning scenery of Exmoor.

If you enjoy walking and feel you would like to lead a walk, please do get in touch. You would be joining a friendly and supportive group of leaders.

In all, over 350 walkers joined and raised over £420 for the Society in 2015.

Exmoor Ponies in the Czech Republic

14 mares have been released into 400 hectares on a former army base 20 miles from Prague. They form the second free-living Exmoor herd in the Czech Republic for conservation grazing.



News from the Groups

Barnstaple . . .

In 2015 the Barnstaple Group moved its AGM from March to September, together with the start of its programme of events. The Group's treasurer, Peter Weeks, 'retired' from his role after many years of hard work and he received a resounding vote of thanks for all his efforts. Charlotte Homewood has kindly taken over the role of Treasurer. The Group is thriving, with attendances of over 30 at most meetings.

. . . Bristol

Our 2015 programme of 10 events went without any serious problems (just a few challenges). Most look upon the highlight of the year as our visit to Putham Farm the ear-tagging centre of the world - quite amazing. That day we experienced typical Exmoor weather; thick fog as we arrived, but brilliant sunshine after lunch when some of us reached the cairn on Dunkery. Sadly in November we lost a founder member of our Group and Life member of the main Society - Gordon Russell - who had strong family ties with Simonsbath and Exmoor over several generations.

Dulverton . . .

At the 2015 AGM, Peter Donnelly stood down after many years of excellent service as Chairman of the Dulverton Group. John White was elected to take over the role, and has since paid tribute to the brilliant work of the committee. The Group events in 2015 were well-supported with talks on a wide range of subjects from hedgehogs and bats to ancient woodland and pirate pottery, and visits included Cothay Manor and Montacute House. Groups members totalled 59 in 2015. New members are always welcome.

. . . Porlock

2015 began with a most informative talk about the trial oyster and mussel beds at Porlock Weir. February's talk, by Nigel Hester from The National Trust, updated us with the information about the flood prevention measures in the Holnicote Catchment Scheme. In March, Dr Helen Blackman the Exmoor Society's Archivist told us about her work and particularly the discovery of a book by Hope Bourne, to be published by Christmas, and the digitisation of

the historical slide collections held by the Society. Rob Wilson-North led one of his archaeological field visits to explain the recent archaeological work at Simonsbath, in April. In May 10 members of the group went to the Cotleigh Brewery and had a most enjoyable visit lead by the brewery owner. On 17 June members and visitors attended Mike Leach's walk around Allerford where we looked at the history of four generations of his family in that village. At the last AGM Peter Leather who has been our Secretary for 11 years , retired and the Chairman paid tribute to his contribution to the Group. Carol Rawle kindly volunteered to be interim Secretary.



© Jennifer Rowlandson

South Molton . . .

Last year we held our annual dinner in January attended by members and friends. In April we had a talk on South Molton workhouse and how it affected the lives of the women inmates. Our two summer outings were a visit to the bathing tunnels in Ilfracombe and a day touring around Wimbleball Reservoir with a visit to Bury. At our AGM we had a talk about the Rice family from Filleigh, some of whose members emigrated to America, and the letters they sent were read out.

We continue to be a very small and mainly elderly group who find it very hard to interest younger and more energetic members. This year we gave free membership to existing members as we have ample funds. However we are persevering and hope to keep going.