



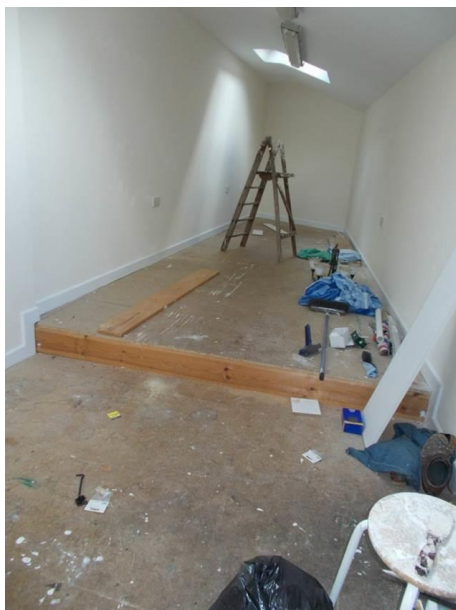
# **The Exmoor Society**

## **Archive, Library and Resource Centre**



*The Long Chains Combe, c. 1958.*

*Photograph from the Harper collection held by the Exmoor Society*



*The archive store, April 2014*

*The archive store, September 2014*



## **The Archive Project**

In 2010 Hope Bourne, a longstanding member of the Exmoor Society and a well-known Exmoor artist and writer, passed away leaving almost all her belongings to the Society. These included over 700 books, pamphlets and journals; her correspondence; manuscripts; drawings and paintings and items such as her china and wellington boots. Simply finding space for all these objects and archive items proved quite a challenge for the Society, a charity, which then had only two rooms in Rosemary Lane, Dulverton.

The Society's Trustees had for some time considered moving premises and also doing more with the archive papers that had been accumulating in Parish Rooms for nearly 50 years. Once Hope's collection was added in, the need for both became more apparent. Thus the Trustees set about finding the resources to employ a full-time archivist. In March 2014 Dr Helen Blackman took up the position as outreach archivist for two years funded by the Society, the ENPA, charities and individuals. Her task, with the help of volunteers, was to catalogue and conserve the letters, photographs, maps, reports, minutes, pamphlets and books collected by the Society and make them more widely known and available to the public. At around the same time, fortunately for the Society, a benefactor bought them a much more spacious property.

These new premises were opened by Mr Graeme Bonham-Carter on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in a ceremony that started at the Town Hall, Dulverton. Graeme is the son of Victor Bonham-Carter, President of the Society for over 30 years and a member of the well-known Liberal family. Mr Bonham-Carter senior wrote many highly acclaimed books about Exmoor and started the Exmoor Press (now Halsgrove Publishing).

## **The Move**

Thus, after 47 years in Parish Rooms, in the summer of 2014 the Exmoor Society moved to 34 High Street, Dulverton. It was with some sadness that we said goodbye to our old home in Rosemary Lane but our more prominent position on the High Street should enable us to engage a greater number of people with the Society's aims and work.

As part of the move we transferred all the Society's archives. Previously this had been on open-access shelves. Much of the material was boxed up but some of it was placed loose, directly onto shelves. Whilst we had an idea of what was in our collections and occasional lists (both typed and handwritten) we did not know exactly what was where. Since none of the lists were on computer or indexed, they were not easy to search.

The archives are now in an environmentally-controlled store and we have a separate library and a resource centre, which anyone interested can consult. The material is catalogued to at least folder level, giving a much clearer idea of what there is and where it is. We have also commenced a digitising programme and all the *Exmoor Reviews* are now scanned and available free to members. Around 1400 slides which record the changing landscape of the moor since the 1950s have also been scanned, providing an invaluable visual record of the moor. Over the next year the Society will be providing more finding aids and archive guides for the public and highlighting the archives so that more people are aware of the material that we hold.

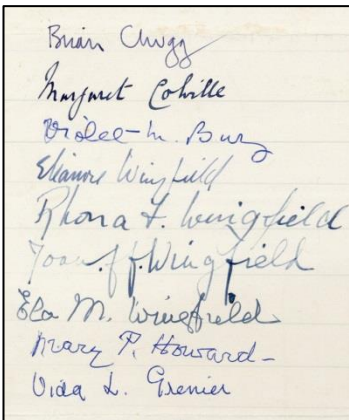
## **The Collections**

The archives hold impressively varied material. There are posters of Exmoor and other national parks dating back to the 1960s; County Council papers from the 1950s detailing debates about whether Exmoor should have national park status; Victor Bonham-Carter's papers including correspondence about the surgeon and huntsman

Charles Palk Collyns; Ordnance Survey maps dating back to the early 1900s and extensive slide collections.



*Landacre Bridge, 1958. Photograph by Roger Miles from a collection held by the Exmoor Society*



*The first names on a petition to save The Chains from planting with conifers, 1958. The Exmoor Society Archives*

Together, this material helps us to build up a picture of Exmoor's history from before it became a national park to the present day. We

have information on important debates, from the future of the red deer herds to the afforestation of some of the most remote and iconic parts of the moor. This material is freely available to consult in the Exmoor Society's resource centre on the High Street, Dulverton.

Knowledge gained from the archives needs to be put into context and so the Society holds a library of over 500 volumes by authors such as Ann and Malcolm MacEwen; Hazel Eardley-Wilmot; Henry Williamson and F.J. Snell. The books are a rich source of material on various aspects of Exmoor's history, archaeology, geography and economy as well as national parks more generally. The archives and library combined give substance to contemporary issues facing the moor.

## **The Future of the Collections**

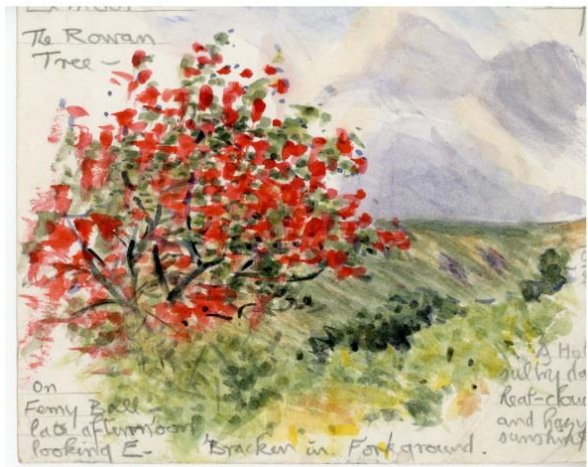
The Exmoor Society's archive records previous changes in the national park and their effects, allowing us to understand and study people's interaction with their environment. Exmoor, as one of the smaller but most diverse of the national parks, is key to understanding how best to conserve such vulnerable landscapes for the future. Small changes on the moor—afforesting a few acres, giving planning permission for new structures, reducing or increasing the numbers of grazing animals—can produce surprising results of greater magnitude than that originally predicted.

Outreach is an important part of the archivist's work, so that people are able to find out about the issues facing Exmoor today and their history. The Society will build on its links with schools, local record centres, museums and organisations such as the Exmoor National Park Authority to provide an information hub. Whilst we cannot answer all queries directly, our aim is to know what information about Exmoor is held where, so that we can help point people in the right direction. We will provide this service for varied audiences, from academic researchers working on peer-reviewed publications to children

undertaking school projects. This might involve seeing if we have a photo of their house, working out when a stand of trees was felled, or investigating Lorna Doone myths. There may be snippets of family history hidden somewhere in our press cuttings or an article about a particular breed of sheep stashed away in an old copy of the *Review*. We would like the Society's resource centre to become a place in which information and stories about Exmoor can be exchanged, shared and preserved. As part of this, we host mini-exhibitions in the resource centre to showcase particular parts of the archive collection.

The Exmoor Society was formed as a campaigning body in response to threats to plant conifers on The Chains. It continued this work throughout the second half of the twentieth century, with Geoffrey Sinclair's research into land use change, and contributions to the Porchester Inquiry into the loss of moorland. Both Sinclair's work and the Inquiry were of national significance. The Society continues to work to protect and enhance the special qualities and diverse wild landscapes of Exmoor. The archive material, library volumes and present-day reports held by the Society help to inform this campaign work and ensure that it is evidence-based.

*Hope Bourne's illustration of a rowan tree, from a collection held by the Exmoor Society*



# The Exmoor Society

Registered Charity No. 245761



*The Exmoor Society's new premises. Photograph by Tony Gibson, October 2014*

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