



The Exmoor Society

Hope L. Bourne Collection



On Winsford Hill, 1959



Some of Bourne's treasured possessions, inherited by the Exmoor Society



The archive team working on the HLB Collection

The Collection

Hope L. Bourne (b. 1918), a long-standing member of the Exmoor Society and a well-known Exmoor artist and writer, passed away in 2010. In her will Bourne bequeathed almost all her possessions to the Society, including her library; manuscripts and research for her writings; and over 2000 drawings, paintings and other items of artwork. The materials that make up the Hope L. Bourne (HLB) Collection are very varied and even those confined to paper – sketches, correspondence, writing, research and legal/financial documents – are often combined in unusual ways. Paper was at a premium and Bourne would sketch on the back of Christmas cards and write shopping lists on the reverse of a watercolour. The acquisition of such a large bequest, and storing and cataloguing the collection to an appropriate archival standard, proved the catalyst for the Society's move to their current High Street premises in Dulverton, from their previous home at Rosemary Lane. In 2015 the new premises were opened. They include a temperature and humidity controlled archive store, which presently houses many items of the HLB Collection. This move puts Bourne's donation to the Society, in a tangible way, at the very heart of the archive.



Pony round up, undated

Bourne's Life

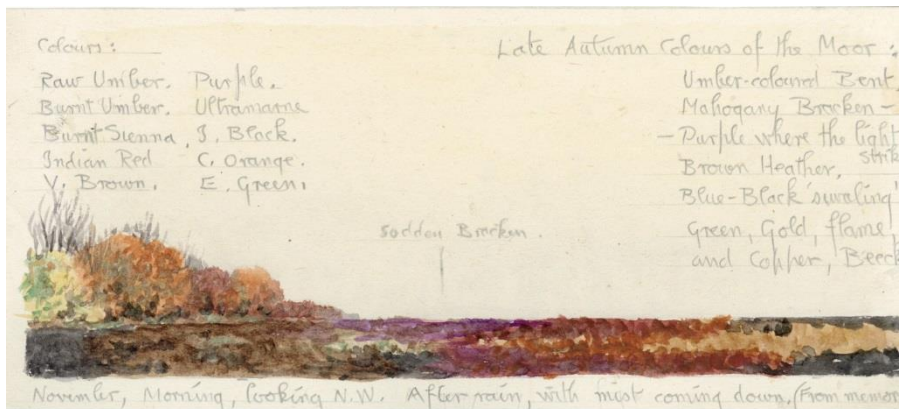
Hope was born in Oxford 3 months before the end of World War I. Her father was probably an Australian soldier stationed in Britain and her mother, Lilian (née Dudman), was a school teacher. Bourne and her mother moved to Hartland, north Devon when she was very young. In 1987, Bourne recalled that although her childhood was happy actually she grew up "very unhappy. I was by nature restless and ambitious, full of energy and imagination, and interested in almost everything, and longed to do great things". She dreamed of "being a leader in life" but "girls in my generation didn't do things like that". Suffering from asthma, and having no father around, Bourne was apparently expected to stay at home. As was usual for many children at the time, her formal schooling ended at age 14. Hope and Lilian moved to the Cotswolds in 1939 and then back to the West Country not long before Lilian died in around 1952.

At that time, Lilian's pension and trust fund would no longer pay out and so, having no income of her own, Bourne had to sell their house. Recounting this in later years she said "I had to face life with no home, no income, and no profession whereby I could earn one". She decided her only way to be independent was to find a roof to put over her head and then obtain as much as she could of life's necessities "direct from nature". For more than the basics she knew she would need an income and so took to writing.

Bourne lived in a succession of primitive cottages and caravans, the most well-known at Ferny Ball near Withypool where she moved in midsummer 1970. She undertook some television and radio work and managed to visit Canada, Australia, Ireland and the Shetland Isles. She survived by hunting, growing vegetables, keeping bantam hens and living a very frugal lifestyle. Bourne looked after livestock for neighbouring farmers and exchanged her drawings, and her company, for meals with friends. In October 1994 she moved into the bungalow in Withypool which was to be her last home.

'Eloquence in Art'

The phrase 'Eloquence in Art', used by her publisher Steven Pugsley as the title of the Society's published collection of Bourne's sketches, is remarkably apt in describing the nature of Bourne's work. Both her sketches and writings can be seen as uniquely the work of someone who was both an artist and an author. The freshness and truthfulness of her artwork belie a genuine and concerted effort for authentic depiction of the Exmoor landscape and its wildlife, often as much through annotation as through the scenes themselves. It was not unusual for Hope to give details of the weather, such as the direction of the wind, as well as the location and date of the sketch, and comments that often include a kind of 'disclaimer' that the colours or scale of the image were, to her mind, not accurate enough. These marginalia also reveal an intimacy with, and a deep affection for, the moor and its inhabitants – at times her additions stray from simply labelling measurements and scale into the more writerly territory of simile and metaphor, whilst in other cases her accuracy and realism seem secondary to an uncontainable enthusiasm for the Exmoor landscape that she understood and knew so well.



November, Morning, looking N.W. After rain, with mist coming down

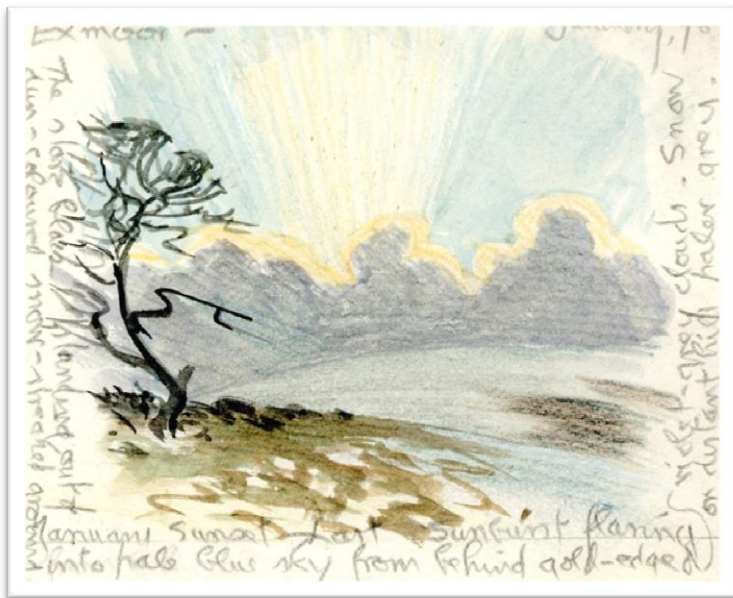


The most beautiful mouse I have ever seen – caught in a trap in the back bedroom, February 1970

The Collection's Future

- The conditions under which the collection was stored during Bourne's lifetime were not ideal. Damage by mice and mould took its toll amongst her drawings; paintings; letters; journals and book research. As a result, much of the material that came into the Society's possession required considerable cleaning and repair.
- The Society also holds many of Bourne's belongings, including items such as her leather jerkin; wellington boots; grandmother's teapot and some dragon-shaped candlesticks. Such a varied collection has complex needs in terms of its handling, subsequent storage and any cleaning or repair that the Society may attempt now or in the future.

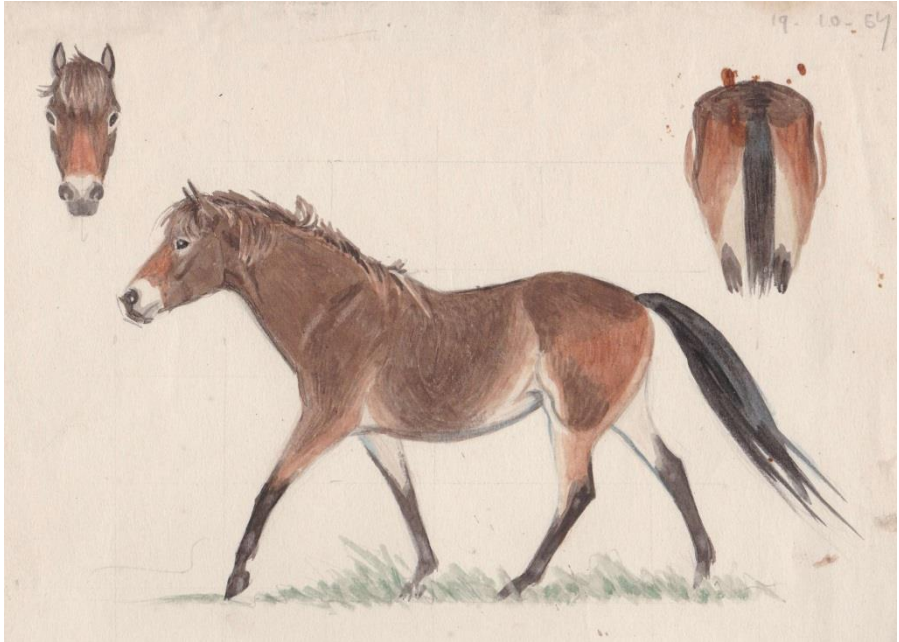
- All the paper-based materials in the collection, which will be stored in the archives, are being cleaned. After consultation with an art conservator, the Society has begun the detailed work of cleaning and conserving some of the more damaged items in the collection. A select few of the most damaged and most interesting pieces of art were worked on by the art conservator herself. In some cases digital restoration is also taking place.
- Dr Helen Blackman, the Society's volunteers, and Lucy Maguire (an intern from Exeter University), have catalogued all the sketches and artwork to folder level, and many to item level with over 2000 catalogued to date.
- Work has begun on Bourne's writings and memorabilia, with the aim of bringing its cataloguing up to the same detail as that for the artwork. The catalogue is available to the public on the Society's database, enabling research and further enquiry, and creating a valuable record of the Society's current archival holdings for future generations.



January sunset, 1978

The Exmoor Society

Registered Charity No. 1160912



“Lucy”, An Exmoor Pony, October 1967

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