

A SINGULAR EXMOOR MAN HECTOR HEYWOOD

By Bruce Heywood

Hailed as the greatest naturalist of his time on Exmoor, Hector Heywood was a man of all seasons totally at one with nature, whether it was farming, harbouring the deer or birds-nesting. He was a crack shot, could plough a straight furrow (set up by driving to his handkerchief tied in the hedge), build a wall or lay a hedge with the best of them.

Born in 1905, the story of Hector's life really begins with his forbears, Exmoor farmers on both sides of his family. He was heavily influenced in his formative years by his uncle Ernest Bawden, the famous huntsman of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds. Hector was a strong man and possessed of an iron will. He knew no fear in galloping the moor, going down a cliff face on a rope end or up the most difficult of trees to climb. Yet according to the psychotherapist Tim Williams Hector became a troubled man from the age of seven because of his involvement in his brother's tragic death. This led on to becoming a difficult man to live with, before, and after his marriage. One can only have great admiration for his long-suffering wife Joan, born into the purple of commerce, but who after marrying Hector in 1940 led a life of trial and no little hardship.

In this perceptive biography of an extraordinary countryman, both hugely talented and staggeringly awkward, Hector's son Bruce Heywood paints an honest yet sympathetic portrait of his father, and of the host of colourful characters who touched Hector's life. Anyone with an interest in Exmoor in particular, or English country life in the twentieth century in general, will be fascinated by the story of this cussed, yet ultimately intriguing character.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Heywood was born at Withypool on Exmoor in 1942. He went to Christ's Hospital School near Horsham for 9 years. In 1964 he went to Seale-Hayne Agricultural College. After a variety of jobs in and relating to agriculture, he settled to farming. He married Constance Ashwin from Londesborough, East Yorkshire in 1970; they had two children, Victoria and Oliver. An opportunity on his father-in-law's estate to farm a larger farm precipitated a move, lock, stock and barrel, from North Devon. He is keen on country sports, hunting with the Holderness Foxhounds in East Yorkshire for 14 seasons. He also owned and trained a few point-to-pointers, the best of which, "Ocean Day" won the prestigious Grimthorpe Gold Cup two years running.

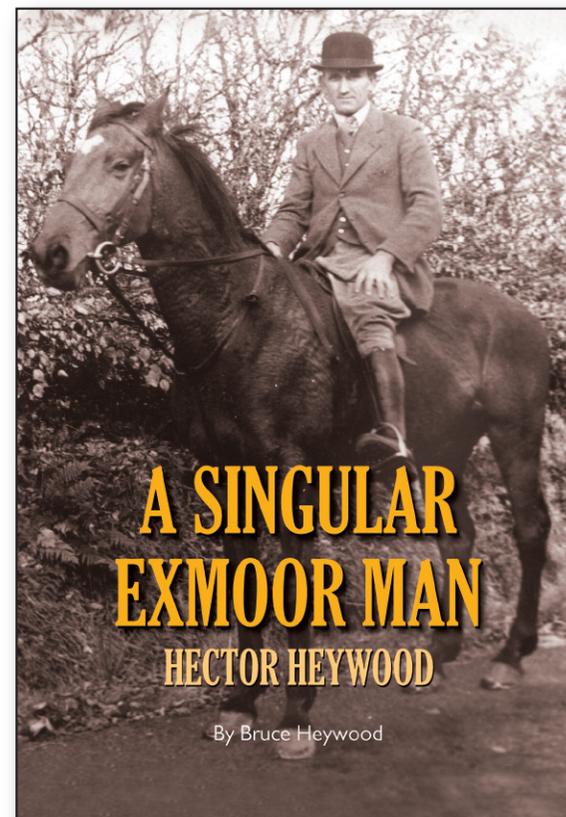
He moved back down onto his native Exmoor to farm at Sanctuary within the parish of Dulverton, where he has hunted with the Devon and Somerset Staghounds for 16 seasons. He was successful as a Conservative candidate in the local elections in May 2011 and represents the Dulverton and District ward on the West Somerset District Council. This is Bruce's first book, which was initiated by a request from Oliver for more knowledge of his grandfather, Hector.

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Hector and Walter Copp out bird nesting, somewhere on Exmoor.



Hector and Joan at the meet immediately after their marriage.

A SINGULAR EXMOOR MAN

Harriet Bowden dressed in black on the left, old Mr and Mrs. Lark and a young Lorna Skelton.

As with 'Whisks' John and his wife Mary, so it was with James and Harriet; they produced ten children in twenty years all reaching adulthood. This would certainly be a testament to Harriet, as she would have had little or no help from James who was farming, hunting or pursuing his other interests. Writing about the Bowdens gives the reader some idea of the background to my father's mother as she had a profound influence on his upbringing and character.

Harriet had only two daughters, one either side of her fifth child Ernest, in the line of ten children. Harriet or Jessie as she was known by, was the elder and Mary, Hector's mother, the younger. Above Jessie were three sons, John the first born being the favourite with his parents yet something of a bully as he was often deputed to keep order with his younger brothers and sisters. Within such a large family there were always cliques, Jessie lent towards her elder brothers and the exciting things they got

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THE BAWDEN'S

up to, appearing hard and unfeeling towards Ernest in particular. Jessie might well have been in the group that smoked out several of the inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Withypool. As substitutes for being land, one's upturned chain harrows laid across the road in the dark (chain harrows are a chain linked spiked implement for improving grassland) by the young men of Withypool, the Hawkridge clan visited Withypool in the dark of night. They soaked basket sacks in the river, which were then placed on top of the chimneys by the smaller and lighter members, with the likes of John Bowden ready with his fists to catch the troublemakers as they fled the smoke filled cottages. We do know that Jessie married Harry Baker the landlord of the Royal Oak, Withypool at the age of 17 and he being 20. Perhaps he caught her red handed in the road and one thing led to another!

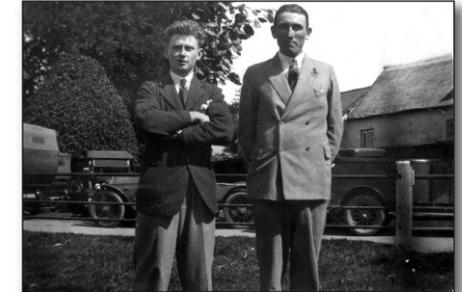
Ernest got on well with his brother James, who was a kindly soul and taught him about nature and the wildlife. James taught him how to shoot by swinging through the quarry as he pulled the trigger he taught him how to stalk the quarry and be unseen, how to tickle trout and gaff salmon in the rivers Barle and Dunsbrook, needless to say poaching. Ernest's real companion was his sister Mary with whom he got on exceptionally well and who gave him in his younger years the affection that was missing in his life. I feel sure that he would have shown her all the things that he was discovering and learning about, especially the red deer which would have been all around them in the fields and woods and up on the moorland.

When Mary was aged three she started to go to school, less than 100 yards up the village street. Alas this did not last long as all the children were withdrawn from the school, never to go again, the two eldest were removed two years prior. There are one or two suppositions as to why this happened: firstly the teacher was a young and attractive Miss Park to whom Harriet's husband James undoubtedly took a shine and maybe she to him. The other possible reason for their removal was that Harriet Bowden was totally dissatisfied by the standard of teaching. Harriet was a strong-minded intelligent, well read woman who hooked no nonsense, so she deserves much praise and credit for establishing a routine of learning with children of divergent ages sitting around a beautiful William and Mary settable, mahogany dining table. The ink stains are visible to this day. Harriet would be doing this concurrent with running the household, nursing a child, probably pregnant with the next one and trying to keep a rein on husband James and keep him focused on the farm. Both the beautiful handwriting of Ernest and a lesser extent that of Mary coupled with the construction and composition of their surviving letters and Ernest's hunting diaries are a lasting testament to Harriet's good work.

Mary would have grown up becoming acquainted with all household tasks such as sewing, knitting, and cooking as well as scalding milk to make clotted cream and using that to make butter. Clotted cream today is not the same in flavour or texture so it is worth explaining just what was involved in those days and still perhaps today in a few cases. The fresh milk (raw, unpasteurised) was put into a large glazed earthenware basin with a wide top (in later years an enamelled metal basin), it was left on a slate shelf in the north facing larder for twenty four hours for the cream to rise to the top of the milk. The basin was carefully moved to the place of heat where the milk was slowly heated to just below boiling so that the cream was gently cooked. At the right moment a ring of bubbles would begin to appear in the cream reflecting the base of the basin, this was the time to remove the basin back to the larder. Here it was left for another twenty-four hours to cool right through. The cream could then be scooped off the surface with a special perforated tool and placed into a dish or bowl as appropriate. Properly produced cream would have a soft crust and was delicious to eat next to bread with honey or golden syrup giving rise to the nickname 'buttered and lightning' or on cut rounds, scones, cake even with fruit such as whorlberries, raspberries or strawberries. To make butter the cream would be put into a bowl and stirred with wooden spoon until it turned to butter; the length of time of stirring depended on the air temperature and that of the cream. There were available special churns into which

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Example of a double-page spread.



Hector and Percy Bawden (left) in Exford with the Holly Tree behind them.

Hector looking into a raven's nest at Butterhill Plantation.