

HOPE BOURNE'S EXMOOR VILLAGE

Hope Bourne

Hope Bourne is renowned as perhaps the greatest Exmoor writer of the twentieth century. For half of her lifetime, Hope lived in and around the village of Withypool on the southern side of the Moor. In the late 1960s, at a time of great personal unhappiness, she sought increasing solace in her friends, neighbours and the landscape around her. Finding her daily business restricted to Withypool and its environs, she set about writing a tribute to the place. She recounts a time before mobile phones and the internet had come to dominate daily life, when communication was a gossip over a half-open stable door and "wireless" meant the radio. She takes the reader around the village, along the river and out again around the parish boundaries, describing people, local events, farms and the changing landscape. Hope's love for Exmoor is apparent in the detailed descriptions and sketches which capture a way of life gradually slipping from living memory.

Having so carefully set down the history and living rhythms of the village, Hope's manuscript was carefully filed away and lost to view for nearly half a century. Then in 2014 Dr Helen Blackman, archivist to the Exmoor Society, rediscovered the text at the Society's headquarters, in a nondescript box labelled simply "Village Surveys". It quickly became apparent that Hope Bourne's love song to her home village was a significant work that fully deserved to see the light of day. Dr Blackman has subsequently prepared the manuscript for publication and chosen a selection of Hope's hitherto unseen evocative line drawings to complement the luminous text.

Hope Bourne's Exmoor Village will be a "must have" for Hope Bourne's many admirers, and for all lovers of Exmoor, its people and places.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

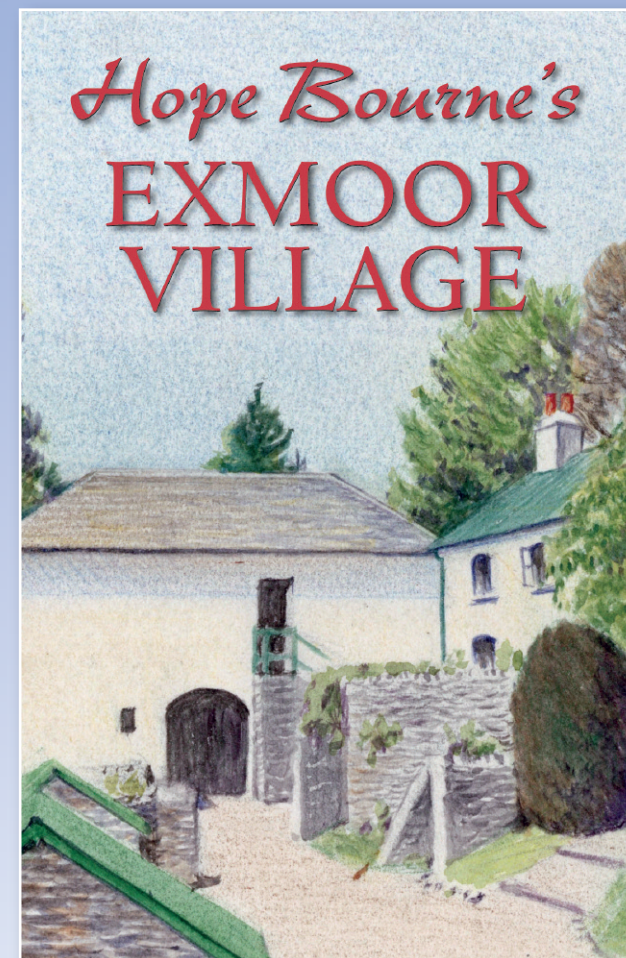
Hope Bourne was born in Oxford in 1918 but brought up at Hartland in North Devon. She lived on Exmoor for some sixty years, for two decades in a caravan at Ferny Ball near Withypool. Growing or shooting her own food, she earned her living as a writer, publishing four books in her lifetime as well as pamphlets and a regular newspaper column. In later life three television documentaries about her life brought her to the attention of an even wider public.

Hope Bourne died in August 2010 a few days short of her 92nd birthday.

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CHAPTER TWO

An Evening with Maps and Some Other Things

A soaking wet late afternoon, the rain flying and driving on a rising sou'west gale, stinging one's face with the hardness of hail, penetrating everywhere and making a misery of everything, whilst the wind buffets about, wrenching at one's sou'wester and raincoat, sending the puddles racing, and with sudden gusts swirling the water off the roofs in showers of spray. There is nothing profitable one can do out of doors except get wet – which is not profitable – so the best and most sensible thing to do is to come indoors and make an early evening of it.

Home is a good place at a time like this. Just below, the river is roaring in a yellow-grey spate, foaming along the very tops of its banks, and making uneasy those folk whose houses are on lower ground (for we have had thirteen days of unceasing rain, and the river can be expected to flood at any moment if the downpour does not ease), but my little cottage is on rising ground, so I have no need to worry. The voice of the river follows me indoors, and then I light the lamp and draw the curtains and shut it out. Tonight is a good night to study maps and documents

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and to do "paper work" for which daylight and sunshine are too precious, and to travel in imagination in time as well as space.

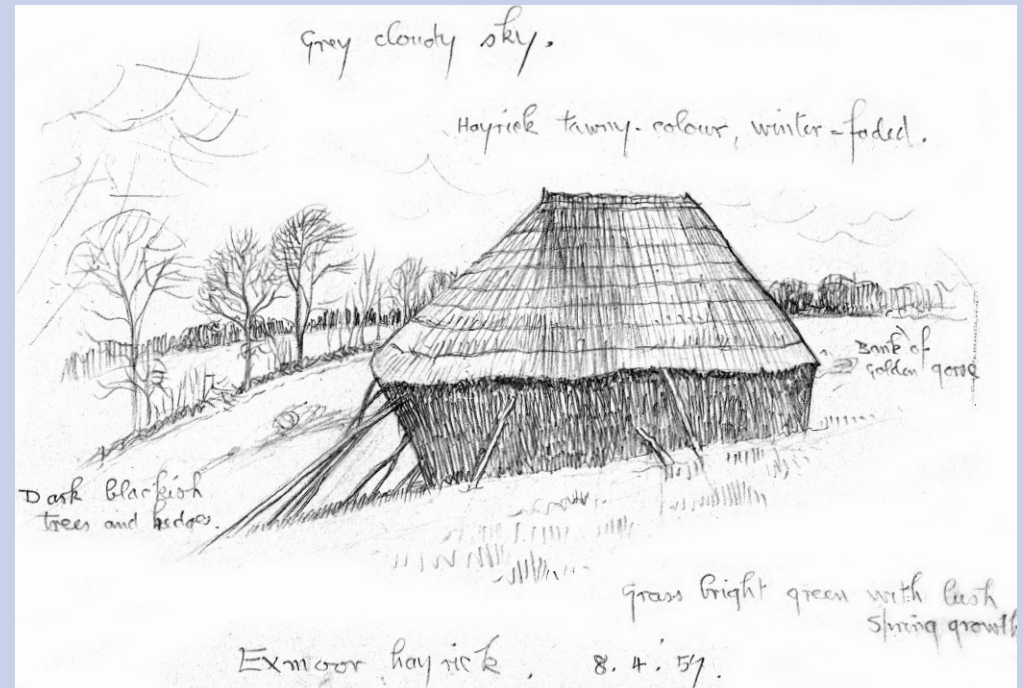
Maps are the best of all literature and I love them. I have about a score here to hand, all relating to Exmoor in general and Withypool in particular, beginning with the First Ordnance Survey of 1809 and ending with the latest published Tourist Map. A map is visual history, and tells one so much more than mere words, and adventure also, for as I've said it takes one travelling far and wide in comfort on a night like this. And ancient documents too, dull as they may seem at first sight, are full of interest when one relates them to the place and life around one. So I have quite a pile of transcripts about me now, and they pay for delving into between tea and supper.

Maps, deeds, and records – what has history to say of Withypool under the moor? Not a great deal in words, and one must guess the greater part "reading between the lines", supplementing written history with the evidence of things around, and judging from what one knows oneself about the country and its yesterdays in general. The oldest documentary reference to Withypool is a brief entry in the Domesday Book of 1086. Then, as from the thirteenth century onwards there are various documents relating to the Forest of Exmoor, most of which in one way or another have some passing references to Withypool. Then come the Parish Registers which begin in 1653. Then the first mile-to-the-inch Ordnance Map which followed the survey of Devon and Somerset in the early 1800s, and which shows Withypool in the context of the countryside of the time. From round about the end of the eighteenth century there is Parson Boyce's Hunting Diary, which, though it does not relate specifically to Withypool, has frequent references to the district, and is relevant in as much as Parson Boyce was sometime Rector of Withypool and lived in the village. There also exist manorial records for the Manor of Landcare, but I have not had access to these. There are two lists of the free suitors. The great Tithe Map of the parish (which I had the pleasure of browsing over only yesterday, by kindness of the Rector) dates from about 1839 – the exact date on the parchment is smudged – and presents the local topography in greatest detail. Lastly, there is the present Ordnance Survey series, begun I think in 1870, consisting of various one-inch, two and a half-inch, and six-inch sheets.¹

Unfortunately all the records and papers of the Acland estate, which were lodged at Exeter, went up in flames in the "blitz" on that city in the last war, and so Withypool has lost a good deal of probably interesting historical material, for the Aclands were, I believe, extensive landowners in the district, as well as Wardens of the Forest.

¹ The 6" to 1 mile scale for mountain and moorland was agreed from 1863.

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Example of a double-page spread.

