

Roger Jeffery Michelmores

Obituary written for the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers' Newsletter

By Jonathan S Aylett

Roger Michelmores died peacefully at home in Berry Pomeroy on 1st November, aged 93. Born in Exeter, he was a Devonian to the core with family roots in the South Hams going back centuries. His Father was Senior Partner in the family firm of Michelmores Solicitors of Exeter and High Sheriff of that city, whilst his Grandfather was the first Clerk to the Devon County Council. During the 19th and early 20th centuries cousins in Totnes were successively agents to the Duke of Somerset, responsible for the management of the Berry Pomeroy Estate. This background of family service in the community had a profound influence on Roger's life.

He was educated at Greshams School in Norfolk, near the home of his Mother's family, but her death when he was still only a young man resulted in his spending a great deal of time during the holidays on Dartmoor with the family of his uncle, Major General Sir Godwin Michelmores. It was here that he learned to ride, a lifelong recreation, on one occasion crossing the Moor by pony from Tavistock to Moretonhampstead with his cousins. Here too were sown the seeds of an interest in the use and management of the upland landscapes of the National Park by farmers, landowners and public authorities alike.

As for many of his generation, World War Two forced a rapid transition from youth to manhood and Roger served for four years in the Royal Marines. With the return of peace he was articled to the firm of Henry Duke & Sons of Dorchester where he spent many hours compiling compensation claims on behalf of owners of Dorset heaths which had been used for military training purposes during the war. Assessing the cost of replacing the fancy wrought-iron railings at Rempstone Hall was a not inconsiderable valuation challenge. He then worked for the District Valuer in Truro, qualifying as a Chartered Surveyor whilst also completing a course at Seale-Hayne Agricultural College in agriculture and estate management.

Roger joined the firm of Michelmores Loveys in Newton Abbot in 1952 and worked for the firm of Michelmores Hughes (as it was to become) as a Partner, Senior Partner and Consultant for over 50 years, regularly attending the office well into his eighties. Among his many clients were the late Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, the late Miss Margery

Ilbert of Bowringsleigh, Kingsbridge, Sir David Hoare Bt. of Luscombe Castle, Dawlish, and the late Jack Simpson of Spitchwick Manor, Poundsgate.

With the passing of the Commons Registration Act of 1965 and the requirement to register common rights it was inevitable that Roger was needed to provide evidence at many hearings by Commons Commissioners occasioned by objections to registrations maintained by Devon County Council under the Act. As Steward to the owners of Blackslade, Natsworthy and Spitchwick Commons on Dartmoor, and advisor to the owners of many other Dartmoor commons and farms, he was supremely qualified to do so and gained a wide reputation for his knowledge of the legal intricacies of the Act. A letter of 1968 from a Bristol solicitor acting on behalf of a mutual client records, "I think your completion of the claim to Venville Rights is masterly".

Following the passing of the Dartmoor Commons Act in 1985 Roger was appointed by the National Park Officer as one of two persons to sit on the Dartmoor Commoners' Council to represent the interests of landowners other than the Duchy of Cornwall. He served on the Council from its inception for 25 years. During this time, on account of his understanding of Dartmoor customs and farming practices, legal sagacity and his innate courtesy, he was able to establish a close relationship with the Chairman of the Commoners, Mr John Hodge, whilst successfully defending the interests of owners of commons and earned the respect of the elected Commoners.

Whilst Partner in Michelmores Hughes, Roger held appointments as a Tax Commissioner, Chairman of the Totnes Bench, Arbitrator on the Lord Chancellor's Panel, Trustee of Seale-Hayne Agricultural College, Totnes Archidiaconal Glebe Agent and Chairman and Director of the Totnes and Bridgetown Races Company Ltd. As a Major in the Territorial Army, he was awarded the Territorial Decoration.

Although reserved in manner, Roger had a dry sense of humour and was always considerate towards those with whom he came into contact. He was held in great respect by West Country professional colleagues. At Michelmores Hughes he was our 'Elder Statesman' and will be missed enormously.

Roger is survived by his wife, Dreda, to whom he was married for 65 years, their three children and three grandchildren.