

THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP

Newsletter No. 1



This mailing brings details of the formation of the Edward Thomas Fellowship. At the same time it also, happily, gives me the opportunity to write these few notes, bringing you news of happenings since the centenary events of 1978.

In future a Newsletter will be sent out periodically to all members of the Fellowship. The leaflet gives full particulars of membership and we hope you will care to join.

We welcome Myfanwy Thomas as our President - and congratulate her on the special occasion which took place on the 16th August, her 70th birthday. A painting of her birth-place, The Red House in Cockshott Lane, was sent as a surprise greeting and the bell-ringers of Steep church rang a quarter peal in her honour. Many happy returns, Myfanwy! This event was followed by a happy gathering on 25th September, when Myfanwy was joined in Oxfordshire by our two Vice-Presidents, Edward C. Thomas (ET's grandson) and Edward E. Thomas (nephew) and friends who came from many counties, to walk part of the Icknield Way together in celebration of the reprint of Edward Thomas's 'The Icknield Way' published that day.

In future those of you who become members of the Fellowship will be kept in touch with news and events of interest, including the annual Birthday Walk. Regretfully, from next year the Selborne Bookshop will not be able to keep up their own individual notifications, so please look to the Fellowship. It has been founded at the request of many people from all over the country, and it is our aim to retain 'the easy and happy spirit', to quote, if I may, Myfanwy's own words.

Edward Thomas Centenary 1978 - Laurence Whistler windows in Steep church

The two lancet windows designed and engraved by Laurence Whistler, and subscribed for by many hundreds of people from all over this country and places abroad, have already given pleasure to countless visitors since their installation and memorable dedication by R.S. Thomas in March 1978. The church's visitors book, started in July 1978 sixty-five years after Edward Thomas wrote of 'Steep on Tuesday, and for all I know for ever after', so far runs to 78 pages of entries, people from the British Isles and from many parts of the world, from the Mount of Olives to the West Indies. At least 23 countries are represented and, as the vicar, the Reverend Douglas Snelgar, remarks not all visitors enter their names in the book. Some entries tell their own story - from the one-time neighbours of the Thomases at Yew Tree Cottage to a visitor from Cheshire who lived to grow old, for his entry ends with those names which are part of history, 'the Somme, Arras and Ypres'.

A3 Petersfield Bypass - Concern in Steep

Concern is being expressed over the proposed route of the A3 trunk road in Hampshire. At the present time the Department of Transport favours by-passing Petersfield to the north and east. This route would seriously disturb the landscape in the area of Steep, Stoner Hill, Ashford and Berryfield Hangers and the Shoulder of Mutton, for the road would pass round Steep and below the range of hills known so intimately by Edward Thomas. A Joint Committee concerned with the whole area involved, between Petersfield and Liphook, has been set up to press for a revised 'Brown' route, which would cause minimum disturbance of the environment and local communities and would, at the same time, make maximum use

of the present A3, which has already been improved at considerable cost. They have retained a planning consultant, solicitors and a Q.C. to act for them. SCARRP, the Steep Campaign for Right Road Policies, would welcome your support. Every name strengthens their case: every pound helps them to fight for the preservation of this unique area. Write to Paul Townsend, Sec. SCARRP, Johnsons Farmhouse, Sheet, Petersfield, Hants. A nominal 10p will register your name.

The 9th Birthday Walk will take place next year on Sunday, 1st March, from Steep church at 10 a.m. Please make a note of the date now. Full details will appear in the next newsletter. This year walkers came from 15 counties. Many felt it was the best walk yet. It was certainly a very happy occasion and we would like to record thanks again to the hospitable owners of the three houses once lived in by Edward Thomas and his family, which we visited. Sitting in the March sunshine on the lawn at the Red House and looking out at 'Sixty miles of South Downs at one glance' was indeed a pleasant reward for the climb up the Shoulder of Mutton and the circling of Wheatham Hill.

Death of Harry Coombes, author of 'Edward Thomas, a Critical Study.

Harry Coombes a friend to many of us died suddenly on 18th April this year. We extend to his wife Joy our sympathy. A regular 'birthday walker' from his home in Gloucestershire, Harry only missed one walk during the 1970s and he was with us in March. A frequent speaker in various parts of the country, his knowledge of Edward Thomas gained him a wide audience. He will be missed.

Edward Thomas Publications

Particulars of new publications will be included with the newsletters. This year has seen reprints of 'A Literary Pilgrim in England' and 'The Icknield Way' Forthcoming titles will include 'The Poetry of Edward Thomas' by Andrew Motion and Edna Longley's 'A Language not to be betrayed'. 'The collected Poems of Edward Thomas' by George Thomas will be out in paperback next year, and a reprint of 'In Pursuit of Spring' is coming ... in the spring. I am sure there will be others to record.

Special Events

'A Pine in Solitude' - a portrait of Edward Thomas was performed at the Cheltenham Literary Festival on 25th October. (It was at The Lyric, Hammersmith in March). Compiled by Anne Harvey, she was joined by Annette Crosbie, Tom Durham and Benjamin Whitrow. Anne is currently working on plans to celebrate next year the centenary of Eleanor Farjeon's birth.

Author Shirley Toulson led walkers who met at Cholsey in September to walk part of the Icknield Way. The weather was perfect and the route to Blewbury, where lunch was enjoyed in several of the pubs mentioned by Edward Thomas in 'The Icknield Way', was a splendid walk. Myfanwy's greatest pleasure was to find, as her father had found, the Way sprinkled all along with the beautiful succory.

Items for the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter

The Hon. Secretary, Alan A. Martin, Munster Lodge, 29A Broom Road, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 9PG, will always be pleased to receive information of relevant events, items of interest, publications etc., which could be included in forthcoming newsletters.

Finally, to end on a personal note. Ten years have now gone by since I stood for the first time on the Shoulder of Mutton with Edward Thomas's two daughters, Bronwen and Myfanwy, and Myfanwy's daughter Rosemary, looking out over the valley of beech and yew, of apple trees and mistletoe. Since then many friendships have grown and flourished, and many hours for many of us have been spend in 'thinking and speaking and tasting friendship'. Many people too have found their way to the little shop in Selborne.

May this Fellowship expand and flourish.

Anne Mallinson
October 1980