

THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



Newsletter No. 14

"....I found myself saying 'goodbye'. I heard the word 'goodbye' spoken. It was a signal not of parting but of a uniting. In spite of the unwillingness to be silent with my friend a moment before, a deep ease and confidence was mine underneath that unrest. I took one or two steps to the stile and, instead of crossing it, I leaned upon the gate at one side. The confidence and ease deepened and darkened as if I also were like that still, sombre cloud that had been a copse, under the pale sky that was light without shedding light."

Edward Thomas: 'Rest and Unrest'
- from 'The Stile', written late 1908-9.

"This apprehension of our loss it was that compelled me to conclude my 'Portrait' with his own words" (from 'The Stile', which he quoted to the end). "I thought that this surely was where I felt that I was in touch with him best. It was a parting from James Guthrie, after one of their numerous confidential walks."

- George Thomas, speaking to members and friends in Selbourne last autumn on the occasion of the launching of 'Edward Thomas: A Portrait'.

THE FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY WALK - encompassing the Steep area known to Edward Thomas, now threatened with change due to the proposed Petersfield Bypass - will take place on SUNDAY, 2nd March. The Walk will take the form of two separate circuits; one in the morning, the other - to the Memorial Stone - after lunch.

Assemble outside Steep Church, near Petersfield, at 10 a.m. for prompt 10.20 a.m. start. A Welcome at 10.15 a.m. Please park your car at Bedales School (sign-posted) in Church Road, Steep, and not elsewhere.

The Walk will be led by Mrs. Helen Irwin, a local member, who knows the area well and represented the Fellowship at the A3 Bypass Enquiry. She writes "Though the decision on the Bypass has not yet been received, it is too optimistic to expect Steep to be left unmolested and not to suffer fundamental change, for instance, by the introduction of ceaseless noise where none has ever been, in all these years. This year's Walk, then, may be something of a 'farewell' to Steep, unchanged: but it will also be a strengthening of the associations we all share and cherish." Co-leader will be our Hon. Secretary, Alan Martin.

The Route in the morning will explore the 'Kettlebrook' area in the valley, and in the afternoon, leaving Steep Church at 2.15 p.m. prompt, we shall make for the hills, passing 'Berryfield Cottage' at Ashford Chace, and climb the Shoulder of Mutton. Tom Durham will read at the Memorial Stone, and during the morning walk.

Lunches. The 17th century 'Harrow Inn' can only accommodate inside a maximum 50 walkers - and at 12 noon only - and it will be necessary to let them know our numbers in advance. 'The Cricketers', by "the aspens at the crossroads" in Steep, is the alternative pub. For those who bring their own packed lunches - or are content with a bowl of soup - the fine

1725 thatched 'Sotherington Barn', re-erected at Bedales in 1980, will welcome walkers: where hot soup and cups of tea will be available, through the kindness of Bedales School. As it is necessary to know in advance the wishes of walkers regarding lunch, so that required arrangements can be made beforehand, will you PLEASE complete the form at the end of this 'Newsletter' and return it to Helen Irwin by Monday, 24th February. (The first 50 who opt for room inside 'The Harrow' will be the lucky ones, but they must be there by 12 noon.)

The usual Walk Sheet and Sketch Map will be available, at 20 p., at Steep on the day.

Tea will be available in Steep Church at the end of the walk, prior to the Birthday Tribute, which will be presented by Stephen Lushington and Jill Balcon. Stephen Lushington is the son of Edward's Captain, Franklin Lushington, who was Major Commanding 244 Siege Battery, R.G.A. Both Stephen Lushington and Jill Balcon read in Westminster Abbey at the unveiling of the Memorial in Poets' Corner to First World War poets, last November.

Please Note. In the event of severe wintry conditions being either forecast, or on hand, and you are in any doubt about the Walk taking place, telephone Helen Irwin, Petersfield (0730) 67751, or Anne Mallinson, Selborne (042-050) 307.

A3 Liphook-Petersfield Bypass.

As reported in the last 'Newsletter', the Public Enquiry was held in May 1985. The Inspector completed his Report and submitted it to the Ministry of Transport by December. We are anxiously awaiting the result but to date the Hampshire County Council have no further information and have not been advised as to when an announcement can be expected.

Annual General Meeting.

Following the lunch-time break, the Annual General Meeting will take place in the Barn at Bedales School, at 1.45 p.m., before proceeding with the Walk at 2.15 p.m. Only members can participate in the Meeting, of course, and an Agenda, with a copy of the Accounts for 1985, will be available. A copy of the Accounts will be circulated with the next 'Newsletter', so that those unable to attend are kept fully informed.

LAST YEAR'S AUTUMN WALK, 13th OCTOBER

"The days that make us happy make us wise", quoted Fellowship member Michael Reynolds from John Masefield, 'The Ledbury Scene', in writing himself from Wales to record that the Autumn Walk had been "a perfect day in all ways". "Most of my days are long and mainly happy", wrote Michael, "but Sunday was long and filled to the brim with good things. The walk was superb with meadow, hill and wood, and the weather perfect to enjoy it all."

The following report comes from Eric Jackson, who, with 'Coggie' Robert Coghlan, led the walk -

"On a day of glorious sunshine and warmth, some 30 members assembled at Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire for the annual Autumn Walk. The Walk began by passing through a deer park where members were able to see the deer at very close quarters and if they were not able to touch, at least some were able to record the event on film.

"Climbing to the obelisk which was erected in memory of Lord Somers (once Chancellor of England), the party were able to regain their breath and strength by taking in the panoramic view, not the least part of which was the turreted and castellated castle of Eastnor in its woodland setting.

"More beautiful views and more breathlessness took us some two hours later to a very welcome lunch and refreshment at the 'Malvern Hills Hotel'.

"No one availed themselves of Douglas Snelgar's offer of a lift back to Eastnor after lunch, and indeed some members climbed to the top of the pre-Christian British Camp (Hill Fort) before remembering to wave to Douglas below!

"The return was eventful again for the views and the sunshine - and for those who desired more, hang-gliding - or almost!

"Time for tea in Ledbury, a visit to see the Thomas, Frost and Gibson cottages for some, and the day was perfected by the presentation of 'Elected Friends' in Dymock Church in the evening."

'Elected Friends' - a programme devised by Anne Harvey, was performed in the evening at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Dymock as part of the 900th celebrations of that village. The readers were Hugh Dickson (Narrator), Ed Bishop (Robert Frost), Annette Crosbie (Helen Thomas), Tom Durham (Edward Thomas) and Anne Harvey (Eleanor Farjeon). Hugh Dickson also read the words of John Drinkwater, Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Gibson and Lascelles Abercrombie.

Several members on the Autumn Walk attended the performance (including the poet's niece, Cecily Walker) and were rewarded by a memorable evening, which encapsulated the literary friendships which were formed in that part of the country around 1914.

THE PRESIDENT'S BIRTHDAY.

On Myfanwy's 75th birthday, 16th August, a bouquet of flowers was sent on behalf of the Fellowship. A letter of appreciation in which she conveyed her thanks was sent to the Committee and members - "I was deeply touched and completely overwhelmed by the exquisite arrangement....thank you all so much for such a lovely thought and gorgeous manifestation of your warm wishes".

THREE CHEERS FOR 3 STARS A 4TH TIME!

'The White Horse', Priors Dean has again been awarded a top three-star rating in the current issue of 'The Good Pub Guide' - one of only three inns thus rated in the 1986 edition, and the only one to achieve this award for four years in succession. Well done, 'White Horse'!

'THE RED HOUSE' PLAQUE

The plaque, subscribed for by members and designed and engraved by George Taylor, also a member of the Fellowship, was unveiled on the evening of Friday, 30th August, two weeks after Myfanwy's 75th birthday.

It was a happy occasion. The sun shone for the ceremony and afterwards, when we stood on the lawn below the terrace, looking out at the view of "Sixty miles of South Downs at one glance", and remembering 'Wind and Mist', the mist gradually rolled in.

George Thomas's address is attached at the end of this 'Newsletter'.

EAST HAMPSHIRE POST

Edward Thomas plaque unveiled at Froxfield



A handkerchief once owned by the poet Edward Thomas was used during the unveiling ceremony of a plaque at the house in Froxfield where he lived for four years.

The unveiling was done by Myfanwy Thomas, the poet's only surviving daughter, who was born at the Red House, in Cockshott Lane.

Edward Thomas and his wife Helen lived in the house at the top of Stoner Hill from 1909 to 1913.

About 60 people attended the ceremony, including the poet's grandson Edward C. Thomas and his wife Jennifer who travelled from their home in the Shetland Isles to be there.

Professor R. George

Thomas, of University College, Cardiff, read from the poet's work and actress Jill Balcon read a passage from Helen Thomas's book in which she describes the Red House.

The present owner of the house, Mrs. Leslie Sykes, was thanked for allowing the plaque to be placed there and was presented

with a copy of Myfanwy Thomas's book "One of These Fine Days", which describes her childhood.

● Pictured at the unveiling ceremony are (from left) Mr. Edward C. Thomas, Mr. George Taylor, Mrs. Leslie Sykes, Miss Myfanwy Thomas, Professor R. George Thomas, Jill Balcon, and the Rev. Douglas Snellgar.

EDWARD THOMAS COMMEMORATED AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY

On the evening of Monday, 11th November, a Memorial was unveiled in Poets' Corner to sixteen poets of the First World War "who not only wrote during this period but wrote about war....collectively a unique outpouring of English verse....the mood changing as the war went on". The Dean of Westminster, the Very Reverend Edward Carpenter, performed the welcome and introduction to the Service, and the Oration was given by Professor Michael Howard, C.B.E., M.C., Regius Professor of Modern History and Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, who ended by saying "So the Great War poets remain unique: unique in the quality of their diction, unique in the tragic intensity of their message. Their suffering has passed into our common experience, and has enlarged our common understanding. After they wrote, no one could ever think of war in the same way again; and they thus made it less likely that there ever would be war again. Out of the furnace of battle they told us what war is like. They achieved the object of all great art: they told us the truth. That is why we honour them today."

After the Poet Laureate had unveiled the stone by withdrawing the Union flag, there were readings from the poets by Ted Hughes, Jill Balcon, Stephen Lushington and Richard Pasco. It is of interest to note, and we are proud to record, that three of the readers are members of the Fellowship.

Following 'Lights Out', Edward Thomas's poem 'In Memoriam - Easter 1915, movingly read by Jill Balcon, brought the ceremony to a close.

In addition to members of Edward Thomas's family, many members of the Fellowship were present at the Service.

As a personal tribute, at the end, Myfanwy placed a simple posy of flowers, leaves and berries from the Shoulder of Mutton, and from 'The Red House' and 'Yew Tree Cottage' on the Memorial. The words on the attached card read "For all Poets. Flowers from Steep where Edward Thomas lived and wrote." And, nearby, someone also stepped quietly forward to place a Flanders poppy and a sprig of rosemary in memory of Charles Sorley.

The memorial tablet is of grey slate, designed and engraved by Harry Meadows. The poets' names are in white lettering and the Wilfred Owen quotation is in poppy red.

Professor Michael Howard's 'Oration' is available from the Hon. Secretary at 75 p. a copy, including postage.

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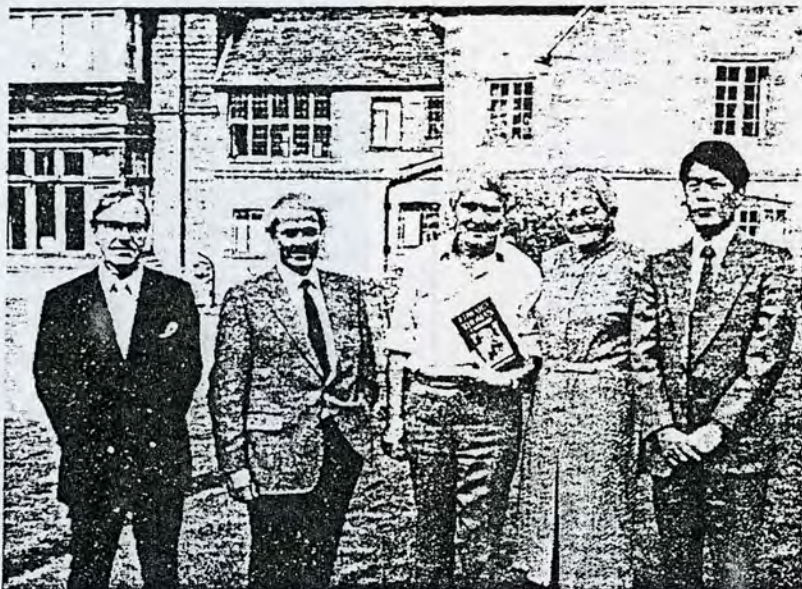
Robert Graves, who died on 7th December 1985, in his ninetieth year, is commemorated on the Memorial with Edward Thomas in Poets' Corner, and Alan Martin represented the Fellowship at the Memorial Service in St. James Church, Piccadilly, on 22nd January.

A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY.

Professor Thomas's long awaited biography 'Edward Thomas: A Portrait' was published last autumn, and was well and widely reviewed. Many members attended the occasion at the Selborne Bookshop, where the book was launched.

Mr. Misao Iida, of the University of Tokushima, is now a member of the Fellowship. He wrote on his return to Japan "It was one of my greatest experiences that I could attend the celebration of the publication of Thomas' new book by Professor R. G. Thomas. I'll never forget that occasion in my life."





The garden of the Gilbert White museum in Selborne, which adjoins the Selborne Bookshop, was the picturesque setting for the launch of EDWARD THOMAS: A PORTRAIT (OUP, £12.95), a biography of this author and poet by Professor R George Thomas (no relation). Members of the family, including Myfanwy Thomas, younger daughter of the poet (above), joined with Thomas enthusiasts, among them (from left) Richard Emeny of the Thomas fellowship, Edward Cawston Thomas, the author, and - en route back to Japan - Misao Iida. Seventy-six copies of the book were signed.

A BEDALES WELCOME.

In November, Myfanwy, to whom the book is dedicated, joined guests at Bedales School, Steep, for the launch of 'Edward Thomas - A Mirror of England', compiled by Eliane Wilson, in calligraphy and with illustrations by Frederick Marns. The reception was given by the publisher, Anthony Werner, of Shephard-Walwyn Ltd. and Anne Mallinson, of the Selborne Bookshop, appropriately at the school where the poet and his family have a long-standing connection.

Fred Marns inscribed and signed many copies for those present but most regrettably Eliane Wilson could not attend, due to a sudden family illness. An inscribed copy was presented to Bedales for the school library.

TRIBUTES.

Lady Dorothy MacAlister, widow of Edward Thomas's life-long friend Sir Ian MacAlister.

Lady Dorothy died in 1985. The Fellowship sent a floral tribute, with a special message from Myfanwy, our President. Ian MacAlister and Dorothy married in 1909. Edward Thomas's elder daughter, Bronwen, was a bridesmaid. Ian MacAlister was one of Edward's special friends. They had known each other since their St. Paul's and Oxford days.

When Edward and Helen moved to 'Berryfield Cottage' from Kent in 1906, Ian MacAlister was one of those who visited them for weekends, as R. George Thomas records in 'A Portrait' (page 138), "...for long long walks (including mid-day rests at inns off the beaten track) and longer evenings of conversation, gossip and singing".

In 1939 Sir Ian's contribution 'I knew Edward Thomas' appeared in 'The

Listener', on 5th January. "He seemed to be a born poet. He loved and understood poetry as few men of his time did." (Acknowledgment to William Cooke, 'Edward Thomas: A Critical Biography' for this note.)

A Friend of the Fellowship, Anthony Brode - Literary Editor of 'The Southern Evening Echo'.

When Tony Brode died, at the age of 61, last June, the Fellowship lost a staunch supporter and a particular friend.

"Author, wit, gentle satirist, and a man with a gift for making and keeping friends", wrote a newspaper colleague, "Tony Brode brought to his job a cultured mind and a deep love of books and good writing."

Like Edward Thomas, Tony wrote with deep affection and wide knowledge of the South Country. "He loved its landscape", continued the appreciation, "but to Tony Brode, people were more important than places."

From the early days of the Birthday Walk the event had received Tony's interest and enthusiastic support. Publications and special events relating to Edward Thomas also enjoyed generous cover in his columns. He was always disappointed when other commitments prevented him from attending a Thomas event: happily he missed few. It is now we who miss him. "A gentle man, a kindly man", a life-long friend wrote of him, "No doubt we should say how lucky we have been to have known him. And we will. But he left us wanting more."

In company with a kindred spirit, the renowned journalist, the late Patrick O'Donovan, may the memory of their meeting - and their coverage of the occasion (the unveiling, by Edward Cawston Thomas, of the cherry-wood plaque in memory of the poet, sculptured by George Taylor) - at the 'White Horse', Priors Dean, on the evening of the centenary of Edward Thomas's birth, 3rd March, 1978, linger on 'up in the wind'. For it is as true of Tony Brode as it is of Edward Thomas: the 'Echo' wrote of their Literary Editor "....When he wrote about his beloved Hampshire he always painted a landscape with figures. He loved country pubs, 'laughter and the love of friends' - and friendship was one of his greatest gifts."

To Father, and Son - A Tribute.

When Michael Bennie, who lived in Surrey, wrote on 3rd March, 1974 to express his pleasure at having heard about, and been able to take part in, the very first organised 'Birthday Walk', led by John Bowen, one could not conceive then that a month later he would, tragically, be dead. Or, even more, that 11 years on his 18-year-old son, Christopher - who for several years had, too, walked in both his father's and Edward Thomas's footsteps - would also meet a similar death.

Christopher collapsed in Austria in April 1985, while on a singing tour, and failed to regain consciousness. An outstanding pupil of Lord Wandsworth College, which he left in 1984, he had just won a place at York University to study Music. Christopher and his College tutor, Stephen Stuart-Smith - a member of the Fellowship - had joined in the Birthday Walk for several years. As a youngster, Christopher took part for the first time when he accompanied his mother, Marcia, on the walk in 1975 - the year following his father's death. To Mrs. Bennie and her daughter, Claire, we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

(In memory of Christopher, Lord Wandsworth College, at Long Sutton, Hampshire, RG25 1TB, have set up a fund, The Christopher Bennie Fund, to give

financial assistance to other deserving pupils to enable them to undertake some period of travel and study, particularly in the time between school and university.)

WEST LONDON LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE.

This event, to consider 'Literature as a source for East London's local history', will take place on Saturday, 26th April, at The Waterman Arts Centre, 40 High Street, Brentford, Middlesex, starting at 10 a.m. Several literary figures who lived and worked in the area are the subject of talks and discussion, including Charles Dickens, Horace Walpole, William Morris and Edward Thomas. The lecture on Edward Thomas will be given by his nephew, Edward Eastaway Thomas (Vice-President).

Tickets are available from the Secretary of the Conference Committee, Mrs. Diana Gunasena, 52 Oakhill Road, London, SW15 2QP (tel: 01-874 6763), price £3.25. Refreshments and lunch will be available at the Arts Centre.

AUTOGRAPH LETTERS AT AUCTION.

On 28th November, 74 autograph letters of Edward Thomas to Jesse Berridge (two in Berridge's hand to Mrs. Berridge) were put up for sale at Bloomsbury Book Auctions, London, at an estimated price of £8,000-£12,000. The bidding did not reach the reserve price and consequently they were returned to the owner. They were catalogued as 'the Property of a Gentleman'.

Anyone interested in the collection (or some of the letters) should contact the auctioneers, Kerr, Herrmann & Stagg Ltd., 3 and 4 Hardwick Street, London, EC1R 4RY (01-833 2636/7).

The Enitharmon Press published in 1983 'The Letters of Edward Thomas to Jesse Berridge', including a memoir by Jesse Berridge, at £8.50. The letters were edited and introduced by our member Anthony Berridge.

It is interesting to note that a copy of 'An Annual of New Poetry, 1917' came up for auction in December at Taviner's, Bristol, which included contributions by Gordon Bottomley, W. H. Davies, Edward Eastaway (Edward Thomas) and Robert Frost. This copy had been inscribed to Laurence Binyon from Gordon Bottomley and was expected to reach at least £60/75.

A LETTER OF THANKS....

....Colin Thornton, our member in the Isle of Wight, was extremely grateful for all the replies he received to his request to replace his tapes associated with the poet, which unfortunately had been destroyed. Colin thanks "other members for rallying around a fellow member in distress".

Mrs. Roland Watson - our first Honorary Life Member - is in hospital at present. We send her our very best wishes and hope that she will soon be more happily situated.

PUBLICATIONS.

NEW - 'Morning has Broken' by Annabel Farjeon.

Published by Julia MacRae Books, 24th April, 1986.
328 pages, illustrated, price £14.95.

Annabel Farjeon is the niece of Eleanor Farjeon; this biography will be of interest to Fellowship members, as Eleanor Farjeon was a friend of both Helen and Edward Thomas, and helped Edward with the preparation of his first poems. The jacket cover is Constable's painting of Hampstead Heath, which is appropriate as Eleanor lived nearby, and 1986 is the millenium year of Hampstead.

REMINDERS - 'Edward Thomas: A Portrait' by R. George Thomas.
Oxford University Press, price £12.95.

'Edward Thomas: A Mirror of England' selected with an Introduction by Eliane Wilson, calligraphy and illustrations by Frederick Marns.
Shepherd-Walwyn, price £10.95.

'The Pity of War', an anthology selected with an Introduction by Jill Balcon.
Shepherd-Walwyn, price £6.50.
Published to commemorate the unveiling of the Memorial in Westminster Abbey.

All these titles and many others by and concerning Edward Thomas are available from Mrs. Anne Mallinson, The Selborne Bookshop, Selborne, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3JH (042 050307).

DIARY DATE.

The Autumn Walk will take place in Sussex, on Sunday, 5th October, in the Flansham area associated with James Guthrie of The Pear Tree Press, and Eleanor Farjeon. Details in the next 'Newsletter'.

MEMBERSHIP.

Subscriptions.

The annual subscription was due on 1st January, except for new members who joined since 1st October, 1985. We thank those who have already paid but will other members please complete the enclosed form of renewal and send it to the Hon. Secretary, Alan A. Martin, 20A Waldegrave Gardens, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW1 4PG, as soon as possible, together with their cheques.

We are grateful to those who pay by banker's order and this is the time to consider changing over, to save you (and us) the paper-work and cost each year. It would be appreciated if all those who pay by order will check with their bank that the correct sum is being credited to the Fellowship - there are a few members still paying the old subscription rate! Single membership is £4 and double membership £6, and regretably we must delete those paying the incorrect annual subscription.

Membership Drive.

Let us all introduce one new member in 1986. The number of new members joining each year is not keeping up with resignations. The more members we have in the Fellowship, the better we can fulfil our aims and retain the subscription rate as at present. Write to the Hon. Secretary if you know of any way he can assist you.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE 'NEWSLETTER'.

This if your 'Newsletter', and we would like to include more news and items from different parts of the country and from overseas. Information about relevant literary and topographical events would be welcome; comments and criticism (of a reasonable length) could be included too. Send your contribution to Alan A. Martin, 20A Waldegrave Gardens, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW1 4PG.

Anne Mallinson.

January, 1986.

BIRTHDAY WALK - LUNCH TIME.

Please complete and post as soon as possible to:-

Mrs. H. H. Irwin,
11 School Lane,
SHEET,
Petersfield,
Hampshire,
GU32 2AS

the form below, indicating your preference for lunch. 'The Harrow' is limited to fifty Fellowship members and friends due to the constricted space available, so applications will be taken in order of receipt. The remainder of the party can be accommodated in the Bedales Barn, with 'The Cricketers' pub, and this may be your preference.

The address spoken by Professor R. George Thomas on the occasion of the unveiling of a plaque on 'The Red House' by Myfanwy Thomas - 30th August, 1985.

Edward Thomas was a marathon walker, whether alone or with a chosen companion. Most of his friends agreed that he had earned the nickname 'Walking Tom' which Herbert Farjeon and Clifford Bax bestowed on him in September 1913. But today, here at Wick Green - near Froxfield and above Steep and Berryfield Cottage - we must recall the other, fruitful, stay-at-home side of his complex nature.

From October 1900, Edward and Helen lived in five houses before they moved to Berryfield Cottage in October 1906. From then, until they moved to High Beech in Essex in October 1916 - not long before his final preparations for service in France - Edward ceaselessly explored the Hampshire countryside within the lozenge bounded by Alton, Selborne, Liphook, Petersfield, South Harting, Butser Hill, Froxfield Green and Bramdean. Inevitably this particular stretch of the South Country - in which he felt so much at home - provided the backcloth for nearly half his poems. Close to where we stand today, in the Bee-house study - redolent of honey and the hum of bees, according to Ernest Rhys - most of his poems were recorded in their finished form. Here we are close to this poet's special place.

I recall the joy with which I leafed through his 80 notebooks, preserved in the New York Public Library, and discovered that nearly fifteen of them were scribbled down in the Bee-house study between 1910 and 1914. Sometimes there were three or four entries for one day, describing the movement of clouds across the vale below or recalling incidents and scenes encountered on his daily walks. As some of you know, I had long rejected the over-melancholy portrait of him. Irritation may have produced a pearl - at least G. K. Chesterton thought so in his poem about Don John of Austria - but no fundamentally malcontent nature could have produced the poem 'Beauty', which - there in New York in September 1976 - I could see quite clearly had summed up these numerous prose records of peace and joy experienced in and around Steep:

"This heart, some fraction of me, happily
Floats through the window even now to a tree
Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale,
Not like a peewit that returns to wail
For something it has lost, but like a dove
That slants unswerving to its home and love.
There I find my rest, and through the dusk air
Flies what yet lives in me. Beauty is there."

The notebooks and the poem confirm a letter sent in July 1911 to his brother-in-law Hugh - "I find the same magic hereabouts as ever - which compels me simply to work. Therefore I am working." For 'magic' - child-like wonder, mysterious influences, moments of heightened sensitivity suddenly encountered - these were concepts he would willingly embrace and continue to find the best words for:

"Upon the vast and silent night, the soul is poured out often,
as now.... and the body stands empty, waiting for its return,
and, poor thing, knows not what it received back into itself.
For we stand ever at the edge of Eternity and fall in many
times before we die."

This mystical side of Edward Thomas, I believe, was perennially at work, like an exquisite counter-bass beneath an aria in a Bach passion or oratorio. So when, during an arduous week's walking in Cornwall in the summer of 1908, he had settled with Geoffrey Lupton the precise shape and materials to be used for this new house, he then invested the plans in words which indicate his own aspirations:

"A house is a perdurable garment, giving and taking life. If it fit straight way it begins to chronicle our days."

"Here for this hour we are remote from the parochialism of humanity. Drink but a little of this air and there is no need to fear the ways of men, their mockery, their cruelty, their foreignness."

For, despite his self-racked search for significant meaning behind mundane experience, Edward Thomas never lost touch with human endurance at the bottom of the social scale. His friend James Guthrie got it exactly right: "He was none of your 'great man', bent upon showing his powers at every turn.... To write of him as a man, tangible, practical, good at all manner of fun, is to describe him better than his art describes him. Yet, from his devotion to his work sprang all the rest."

Today, let us recall that his best work - in verse and prose - the work for which he will be long remembered, was conceived and executed within a few miles' radius of where we are celebrating his memory, once again, here today, because - as he stated as he entered the new house in 1909 - he believed in "the calm immortal and unchanging world of imagination and art" which is lovely and desired, "because it is inaccessible to age, winter, hatred, tyranny, disease, stupidity, or death".

This evening, we are doubly fortunate in our celebrations, because the plaque to the memory of his fruitful sojourn in this new house and its adjacent study is to be unveiled by his youngest child, who was born here in mid-August 1910. She was named in English after her mother and her grandmother and, in Welsh, after a mysterious lady - a princess, perhaps a legendary echo of the Mobinogion, but certainly the heroine of a popular 19th century Welsh song that has passed into the repertoire of all Welsh male voice choirs and many a Welsh rugby team.

Myfanwy, I suggest, is a late 19th century bardic creation formed of two elements - Myfi = my own and Manwy (a now obsolete Welsh word) = the rare, subtle quality of rareness, fine quality or fineness. She was the only child that Edward and Helen deliberately planned to have and, as many of his letters show, he was forever caught up in her sayings and doings, which he often wove into his poems.

Ladies and Gentlemen - it now gives me great pleasure to ask my dear friend, and the President of this Fellowship, to unveil this plaque to her father's memory after Jill Balcon has revived for us Helen's own memory of their life at this house. Helen and Edward, two quite different writers, but each with rare power, complement their interpretation of an old Welsh saying:

'The truth against the whole world'. (Y gwir ya erbyn y byd.)
Here is a ready key to their life together.