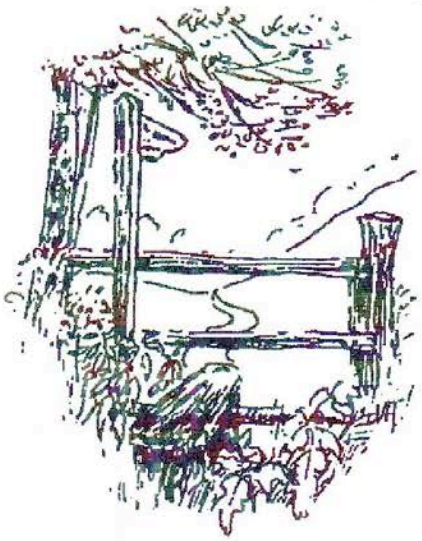
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 66 **August 2011**

We were as ghosts roving among our own tombstones
with no utterance of our own; the birds cried for us.

Contents

Newsletters on the Website

The University of Gloucestershire is to digitise back numbers of the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter so that the entire archive will be available on the Fellowship's website. The work, to be undertaken by the Archivist, Lorna Scott, is expected to take four to five months and will start in September.

The University has an extensive Edward Thomas collection at its campus at Cheltenham, which is the home of the Dymock Poets Archive. It will use the fee for the digitisation to develop its poets, writers and artists collection.

Inevitably one or two misprints have appeared in Newsletter articles over the years but the great majority have been minor. If you have written a piece whose sense has been altered because of a misprint, please let us know immediately so that it can be corrected before digitisation. Authors should also contact us if they object to their articles being displayed on the website. The point of contact is John Monks <jbmonks@btinternet.com> or the Hon. Secretary, Colin Thornton <colingthornton@btopenworld.com>

Uploading the newsletters on to the ETF website will happen as quickly as resources allow. Recent issues will appear first. Access to the newsletters' rich resource of original material will be for everyone, but, as already announced, Fellowship members will continue to have exclusive access to the print version of the latest issues, which will not appear on line until six months after publication.

THE ETF AUTUMN WEEKEND IN DORSET, 23-25TH SEPTEMBER 2011

Regrettably, this event has been cancelled because of insufficient interest.

ARRAS 2012

This note is to bring you up to date with this proposed activity. Looking back, there was a limited response to the initial note in the Journal. Estimated costs were revised upwards following budget quotes from two companies and as result a number of initial respondees withdrew. The matter was discussed at the Edward Thomas Fellowship Committee meeting on 23rd July when it was agreed with regret to cancel the event and replace it with a visit in 2017. The Committee thanks all those who expressed an interest for your interest and apologises for any disappointment.

(David Worthington of the War Poets Association notes that their Battlefields Tour will take place 22nd-25th October 2011. His email address is david@sancreed.demon.co.uk and details are on the website www.warpoets.org 'Our late October Rosenberg/Blunden Somme tour is now being nicely supported and we have recently had a good planning meeting to settle the detail of the journey. We have a few places left so if any of the people who would have gone on your tour next year would be interested in joining us we would be pleased to have them with us. It's not Edward Thomas I know but we will be near Agny and I dare say we could weave something in around ET. If that is of any interest to any of them maybe you would ask them to contact me.')

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The Edward Thomas Fellowship Autumn Walk
Borwick Hall, Lancashire
1st – 3rd October 2010

Some 32 members braved a journey of torrential rain to Borwick Hall for a weekend of events organized by Ian and Breeda Morton. Borwick Hall, parts of which date back to the 12th century is owned by Lancashire County Council. We were greeted by friendly staff at the reception and shown to our modern and comfortable student accommodation. The large manor house is surrounded by tall stone walls and is set in the tiny village of Borwick on the Lancashire-Cumbria border. This magnificent manor house has a history dating back to the Domesday Book of 1086. The great hall is centred around its Pele Tower which is the oldest building on the grounds. A variety of rooms including the Baronial Hall, the Judges Meeting Room and the Panelled Room offer visitors an insight into how Borwick Hall's owners have lived over the centuries. Outside in the neat and tidy gardens squirrels could be seen running around the shrubs and the abundant Michaelmas Daises. During the course of the afternoon, members assembled in the converted Stables to drink coffee and renew old friendships. Prior to supper which was taken in the refectory we met in the bar for drinks and conversation. Following supper we transferred to the comfortable surroundings of the Stables where our Chairman Richard Emeny welcomed everyone to the weekend. A reading given by Heather Cobby and Colin G. Thornton, introduced the area for the weekend.

Heather and Colin drew into their reading letters between Thomas and Bottomley and gave a biographical account of encounters between Thomas, Bottomley, Ransome and Abercrombie when they were staying in the area of Well Knowe, Wall Nook Farm, The Shieling and London. Chris Brown concluded the evening by describing and then playing a CD of Michael Morpurgo talking about his friend and poet Sean Rafferty. Chris played a track, of Michael talking about Sean, followed by Clare Morpurgo reading one of Sean's poems. The CD, '*In Tune with the World - the Poetry of Sean Rafferty: 1909 – 1963'* with several readers including Carol Hughes, Michael and Clare Morpurgo is available from http://www.farms4citychildren.co.uk/ and costs £8.99 including post and packing. The recording was well received and brought the evening to a fitting conclusion before we retired to the bar for further convivial conversation.

Saturday, what a difference a day makes! From torrential rain and gales to a day of autumnal dappled sunlight and birdsong. A fine breakfast awaited us taken in a relaxed atmosphere. At 9:00 a.m. our coach arrived and by 9:15 we were on our way to the Red Lion

at Lowick. The coach meandered along narrow country lanes and as we looked out of the windows we were captivated by magnificent views, Hardwicke sheep precariously climbing the rocky outcrops whilst buzzards soared overhead. It was at the Red Lion at Lowick Bridge that Edward met with Arthur Ransome and Lascelles Abercrombie when they walked from Wall Nook Farm. The Red Lion has changed little since Edward sat there and drank his beer and smoked his pipe with his companions. Low beams overhead and a roaring fire welcomed us as we arrived for coffee with homemade cakes and biscuits, and sunlight streaming through the windows and open door.

Boarding the coach once more our driver proceeded to take us along narrow lanes to Rusland Church and the grave of Arthur Ransome. We left the coach at the foot of the hill where the small river, Ashes Beck, flows beneath the hill on which St. Paul's stands and joins the stream which runs down to Rusland Pool a few hundred yards to the south-west. The church is situated at the top of a hill and as we climbed the steep path, spider webs could be seen glistening with dew in the morning sunlight on either side of the path.

As we gathered around Ransome's grave under a Corsican pine, with the sound of the gentle breeze in the pine needles we surveyed the surrounding countryside; you can clearly see everything Arthur Ransome held so dear about this area. In this tranquil place Michael Reynolds read Edward's poem The Mountain Chapel which was then followed by Richard Emeny reading October. Coincidentally, the origin of the name Rusland is Rolf's Lands or Runulf's Land, the origin of the name Ransome is Runulf's Son.

Returning to our coach we drove to Cartmel where we had a packed lunch that the catering staff of Borwick Hall had prepared for us. We had sufficient time to explore the village, Cartmel Priory and one of the welcoming public houses before we visited Norman Kerr's bookshops. John Kerr had chosen a selection of books on Bottomley and Thomas alongside his many books on all manner of topics within his two shops. The final destination of the day was to be The Shieling, the home of Gordon and Emily Bottomley. As we approached the road which led to the house we passed Hawes Water with its many reedy withy beds where Edward went swimming. The owner of the house Penny McLeod, had left us a delightful card welcoming us to the house depicting The Shieling that she had drawn in 2001. Edward's poem The Shieling was read by Colin. Arriving back at Borwick Hall, Ian asked if it would be possible to be taken on a tour of the building. Mick Waplington took us through the house giving us a history of its development over 500 years.

Drinks were once more taken in the bar as a prelude to a relaxed supper. A short walk in the evening light from the refectory through the gardens led us to The Stables where Chris Brown had arranged an evening of folk music for us. Lucy Farrell, Emily Portman and Rachel Newton had met at Newcastle University where they were taking a music degree. Lucy played viola, Rachel played a Scottish harp and Emily played concertina. Chris in his introduction told us of a coincidence, one of the musicians, Emily was the granddaughter of one of the children that Arthur Ransome subsequently used in his book Swallows and Amazons. The trio quickly won us over as they eloquently introduced a selection of new songs with old bones: old stories with new skin, drawn from folktales, ballads dreams and real life. The evening which was a great success and to paraphrase Edward Thomas, we were made content by nightingales who have no wings.

Sunday morning, and the rain had returned but sixteen intrepid walkers braved the conditions to walk to Arnside Knott, a limestone hill that rises to 159 metres above sea level. Peter Cobby led us through the rain and mist and described the views over Morecombe Bay that we could not see. The circular walk took us over large exposures of limestone pavement and heavily wooded areas. Returning to Borwick Hall for a light lunch we said farewell to the staff, and friends before returning home. Our thanks go to Ian and Breeda for organizing a superb weekend, to Chris Brown and Peter Cobby who enhanced and contributed to our pleasure.

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IMMORTAL SYMBOLS: The Edward Thomas Birthday Tribute: Steep, 6th March 2011

"And of all music the old ballads and folk songs and their airs are richest in the plain immortal symbols...their alphabet is small; their combinations are as the sunlight or the storm…They are the quintessence of many lives and passions made into a sweet cup for posterity. They are in themselves epitomes of whole generations, of a whole countryside." These words, taken from *The Heart of England,* were the opening reading for the 2011 Birthday Tribute in the church at Steep. All except one of the subsequent readings were taken from the same book.

The Emily Portman Trio provided an evening concert during the Fellowship weekend at Borwick Hall, Carnforth, in early October, 2010. They performed a few traditional folk songs but mainly songs written by Emily based around the images and motifs of folk-tales, myths and legends.**1.** So enamoured was everybody there with the music that Emily was asked if she would be able to perform songs for the first Sunday in March. For this occasion she put together a different trio to focus mainly on traditional song. Edward Thomas certainly loved and admired folk song as is well documented in his books **2** as well as in many letters **3** and in memoirs. He had a good voice too, Helen mentions this on a recently discovered recording of herself in conversation with Roland Watson **4**, and he loved to sing the old songs. Edward heard these songs out in the countryside as well as at the inns he stopped at during his many walking enterprises. In his writing he also acknowledged his gratitude to those who had preserved orally shared songs in print as well as the collectors of his own day, Cecil Sharp in particular.

So this Birthday Tribute was a programme of a few brief readings with music from Emily together with Lucy Deakin on cello and Rob Harbron on concertina and guitar. After that opening reading Emily sang an interesting variant on the well-known Seven Gypsies song *The Treble-Tailed Gypsies.* Another reading about "…One who sang a ballad…and the listeners who, all but one, leaned back upon the settles…" was followed by a ballad *George Collins* (no. 85 in The Child Ballads. **5**) Then came another old song the ambiguously titled story of a *Game of Cards*; in reality about the behaviour patterns of a countryside liaison. After this Emily sang a set of words which are a variation of a widespread song though this particular lament was originally recovered in an unusual location, a youth club 'convenience' in Kent. Emily came across the words, with the title *Borstal Boy,* in her research at The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at Cecil Sharp House in London and she then put them together with the traditional tune of *Died For Love.*

The fifth song of this occasion was Emily's own remarkably adept setting of the poem *Love Apples* written by her great-great-grandfather W.G.Collingwood. (Emily's grandmother appears in Arthur Ransome's fiction as Bridget the baby of the Walker family in *Swallows and Amazons*.) Another reading followed beginning "In the Parlour of the inn the singer stood and sang……" to precede the narrative piece *The Oakham Poachers,* a song recorded from a gypsy singer Wiggy Smith in Gloucester in 1974. **6.** Edward had a fascination for people with the freedom, and hardships, of an itinerant lifestyle and included such folk in specific sections in chapter 16 of *The South Country* besides adopting the façade of a responsibility free tramp-figure as an alter ego in some poems as with Jack Noman or Lob. In the poem *The Gypsy* 'the hexameter couplets take their cue from folk verses.' (Edna Longley **7.**)

Our Tribute concluded with a reading condensed from the opening of *In Pursuit of Spring.* "I left London that night on foot. By way of preparation I stayed until after midnight to listen to a sweet voice that drew upon all the gloom and jangle of London the sweet patterns of some old country melodies. Strange and pleasant it was…to live upon a cadence, a melody…*As I walked forth one midsummer morning / A-viewing the meadows and to take the*

air...A pure rose upon a battlefield…would not be of more piercing beauty than those songs just there." Emily, Lucy and Rob then performed their beautiful arrangement of the song *The Banks of the Sweet Primroses,* undoubtedly an old, old, song much loved by countryside singers and first noted down and documented in 1891. The opening is, with minor variations in differing collected versions, as noted by Edward amidst gloom and jangle. The final reading immediately after that song was: "The men and women - who hundreds of years ago were eating and drinking and setting their hearts on things – still retain a thin hold on life through the joy of us who hear and sing their songs." "And of all music the old ballads and folk songs and their airs are richest in the plain immortal symbols."

I think it a very reasonable conjecture to suppose that if Edward could know of the modern dedication of many gifted and skilled musicians towards those songs he so relished he would be wholly delighted. The performances that afternoon in the church at Steep covered a whole gamut of song from the generally familiar through to the classic ballad, the downright earthy to the perennial strife against authority and on to the lovely English pastoral. The music had a wholly captivating quality: the folk songs became exhilarating and intriguing as well as thoroughly enjoyable*. Emily, Lucy and Rob are just three of many youngish and extraordinarily talented people who find inspiration amongst the songs and tunes handed down to us from the orally shared culture of the past. They not only find richly satisfying musical material this way but also have a very real and deep respect for the source singers and musicians. These sources are the working folk and cottage dwellers who often demonstrate astonishing innate musicality in their performances as can nowadays be heard in lovingly collected and preserved field recordings.

The songs were certainly widespread in Edward's day. The collector George Gardiner noted over 1,200 songs in Hampshire between 1905 and 1909. He found a number around the Petersfield area including a fine version of a song titled *Nancy* from William Garrett in Petersfield workhouse. The unprecedented slaughter of 1914 – 1918 had a devastating effect on so much of the order of society including the continuity of collective memory. But tradition is a sturdy beast and however much reduced continually appears to survive. Under the formidable eye of the landlady, former suffragette Annie Dodd, the Harrow in Steep was known locally as a 'singing' pub certainly well into the 1970's. At an event in Petersfield in September last year I heard Annie's son John singing orally transmitted folk songs he'd picked up at the pub, his birthplace, and very much in the old style. Gwilym and Carol Davies noted songs from Annie Dodd in 1973 and collected a fine version of the traditional *The Butcher Boy* from 90 year old Harry Goodchild in 1993. This was at Adhurst St. Mary just over 1 mile, for a crow, from the church at Steep. **8.**

Edward's words "still retain a thin hold on life…" bring to my own mind such people as Harriet and Peter Verrall, born in Sussex in 1854 and 1855. In 1904 the Verralls were first visited by Vaughan Williams as he sought out people who knew and sang old songs. In all he noted 48 songs from this couple, 24 from Harriet, 3 from Peter and 21 they sang as a duo. In 1906 one of the songs Harriet sang for their gentleman visitor was *Our Captain Calls* which gave him the tune he lifted as a setting for the Bunyan poem *He Who Would Valiant Be..* The published title he chose to give the tune, *Monk's Gate,* does not acknowledge the Verralls in person but is the name of the hamlet: it does have a handy ecclesiastical connotation. Harriet and Peter who carried, loved and sang so many wonderful and valued songs, and who passed on to us a rich element of our heritage, lie under a grass mound in an unmarked grave in a Sussex churchyard. But, in Edward's words, they and so many others have a living memorial "…through the joy of us who hear and sing their songs."

Chris Brown

* Unfortunately the church interior was chillingly cold that afternoon but, astonishingly, the music flowed smoothly despite the extreme discomforts of numbed fingers and the singing was pure and true with no hint of shivery vibrato.

Notes

1. Emily Portman and others: *The Glamoury,* a CD mainly of original songs, 2010
2. Edward Thomas: *The Heart of England,* 1906 / *The South Country,* 1909 / *Feminine Influence on the Poets*, 1910 / *In Pursuit of Spring,* 1914
Edward Thomas as anthologist: *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs For the Open Air,* 1907 / *This England,* 1915
3. Edward Thomas: *Letters to Jesse Berridge*, 1983 / *Letters to Gordon Bottomley,* 1968 / Also unpublished letters exchanged with Eleanor Farjeon
4. Unpublished recordings currently being prepared for the Fellowship to archive
5. Francis James Child: *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads:*
Volume 2 of five volumes, 1882-1898
6. Wiggy Smith and other Smith Family members: *Band of Gold,* a CD and 28 page booklet from Musical Traditions, 2007
7. Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems: edited by Edna Longley, 2008
8. Gwilym and Carol Davies: *A Hampshire Collection,* 2010

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Obituaries

Harry Holmes who died on the 9th July 2011 was a founder member of the Edward Thomas Fellowship and its first Hon. Treasurer. Always softly spoken, a kind gentle man, frequently to be seen at the tribute readings to Edward Thomas after the Birthday Walk with his wife Vera. Harry served for many years in the Diplomatic Service and on retirement came to live in Hawkley. His love and knowledge of the Edward Thomas country was reflected in 'A View of the Hangers' one of the two books that were published after he retired. In 2006 after a Birthday Walk, Harry introduced a reading in Steep Church. Everyone listened to every word he said in rapt attention. Many people were so impressed by what he had to say they requested that it be published in the next Newsletter. It was published in the August edition of 2006. I cannot think of anything more fitting than to cite some of what he said on that occasion: 'I would like to begin with that beautiful word "fellowship". In our age of violence and discord, the idea of fellowship - wherever we may find it- is something to treasure. It is safe here - with us.' He concluded his introduction with the words of Longfellow: 'Read from the treasured volume / The poem of thy choice, / And lend to the rhyme of the poet / The beauty of thy voice.' We are much saddened that we will not hear the soft beauty of Harry's voice again, and send our condolences to Michael, Harry and Vera's son and to his family.

Richard Emeny and Colin G. Thornton

Alan Martin who died in February of this year was the first Hon. Secretary when the Fellowship was formed in 1980.

Frequently described as being of one of the 'old school,' Alan's appearance, was never less than perfect for any occasion whatever it was, a gentleman of impeccable manners and generous to a fault. He could at times be a little pedantic, and many of us have happy memories of being gently taken aside and admonished, but always kindly meant.

In the early days of the Fellowship, Alan was a driving force, and along with Anne Mallinson set a solid foundation for the future of the membership.

After the war he worked for BOAC, and then for Barclay's Bank before finally working in advertising. Alan was associated with the Junior Chamber of Commerce for London eventually becoming its President. He represented the Chamber at the J.C.I. World Conferences in Edinburgh, New Zealand and Brussels and was elected an Honorary Life Member in 1964.

At his funeral, an unknown side of his character was shown, in that he was a very kind and loving Godfather to his two Godchildren, both of whom spoke eloquently about their life-long association with him.

Alan was very much involved with The Imperial War Museum as the editor of the Friends Magazine for 14 years. He was the Hon. Secretary for the Charleston Bloomsbury House and Garden Charity Trust for nine years. Serving as a committee member on both The Friends of the Memorial St. George's Church, Ypres and the United Kingdom National Inventory of War Memorials, Alan was the press advisor to The Victoria Cross and George Cross Association from 1976 until his death.

Unstinting in the time that he gave freely to assist the authors of many books, Alan's name is frequently to be found within the acknowledgements pages.

Purely by coincidence, Alan's funeral which was held at St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street was on the 3rd March - Alan would have approved of that.

We send our condolences to Geoffrey Burgess, his partner of fifty years, and Daphne his sister.

Richard Emeny and Colin G. Thornton

Hugoe Matthews died on 10th March 2011 at his home in Shillingford, Devon. He had been an eminent surgeon expert in the diseases of the oesophagus before retiring early to Devon to enjoy being a dealer in second-hand books, and, especially, to follow his great interest in Richard Jefferies. He was Professor of Thoracic Surgery at Warwick University and had devised means of saving the lives of soldiers wounded in the throat, at the same time being similarly successful in prolonging the lives of those with throat cancers. He was also a writer and artist. He claimed that his interest in Jefferies was fired when he bought a copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home*, believing it to be a sequel to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Hugoe's most recent work was *Richard Jefferies: An Index of Themes, Thoughts and Observations,* which was compiled in conjunction with Phyllis Treitel and reviewed in Newsletter 61, four years after a bibliography of Henry Williamson's work. His chief interest however, was always Jefferies, and in 1993 he produced with George Millar *Richard Jefferies: A Bibliographical Study,* which is still the best reference work for Jefferies and was followed by *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies in 1994,* also written in co-operation with Phyllis Treitel. Over the years he also rediscovered unknown or forgotten articles by Jefferies, many of which he published. His scholarship was marked by a meticulousness and that might be expected from a distinguished surgeon. He had been a member and officer of the Richard Jefferies Society for well over forty years.

Richard Emeny

Vivien Noakes had to cancel her lecture to the Fellowship, planned for June 2011 because if ill health. Unfortunately, her illness was worse than expected and she died on 17th February 2011. Trained as a nurse with a background in science, she married Michael Noakes, the well known portrait painter, and only then took a degree in English. An Oxford First led to a doctorate on Isaac Rosenberg, and it is likely that most members know of her because of her work on him. Books included a comprehensive edition of Rosenberg's poems and plays and she edited his complete works in 2008. Prior to her interest in Rosenberg however, Vivien had become expert in the work of Edward Lear. Over the years she produced *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer* (1968 & 2006), *For Lovers of Edward Lear* (1978), *Selected Letters of Edward Lear* (1988), *The Painter Edward Lear* (1991) and *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense* (2001). Becoming interested in the much less known versifiers of the First World War, she produced her most recent book, an anthology, *Voices of Silence: The Alternative Book of First World War Poetry*. She also served on the Oxford University War Poets Digitisation Project Steering Committee. Richard Emeny

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An Appreciation of Seven Founder-Member friends
by Anne Mallinson

> "It is right that I should remember you upon a walk for I have walked more miles with you than with anyone else except myself"
>
> - from Edward Thomas's dedication of 'The Icknield Way' to his friend Harry Hooton in 1916.

A friend of mine, the late poet and essayist William Plomer wrote in his second book of Memoirs, 'At Home', in 1958, "When friends die, part of oneself seems torn away, but really they have added a cell to that transitory agglomeration of cells that is oneself, enabling one to reflect life, to reflect about life and to live more fully than before." The chapter was headed 'A friend writes'.

I had known my seven special Fellowship friends since the 1970s. Myfanwy had first 'introduced' me to Edward Thomas, the poet's grandson and to his niece, Cecily Walker. Jill Balcon and Harry and Vera Holmes were pre-Fellowship walkers and early visitors to my bookshop. I'd first met David Tyacke on an early walk in the mid 1970s, and Alan Martin had introduced himself.

"It is right that I should remember you upon a walk..." Thomas had written in 1916 to Hooton. It seems somehow natural to recall these words now as I remember my Fellowship friends and our inaugural Walk in the autumn of 1980, when Edward's grandson, our late chairman, was with us to actually walk part of the Icknield Way - from Cholsey to Blewbury. He was present again the following year when we walked, further west, on the Quantock Hills - and there again, very sadly, for the last time in September 2009.

I met Edward first in 1978 although we had actually corresponded for several years before. From the formation of the Fellowship Edward attended virtually every annual event and all special occasions such as those at the Imperial War Museum in London, and in France and the unveiling of commemorative plaques in various places. He was dedicated to the memory of his grandfather. I look now at a photograph he sent me a few years ago of the Memorial Stone on the Shoulder of Mutton and the quotation on the plaque "And I rose up and knew that I was tired and continued my journey" He had written with the photograph "I've often tried to photograph the stone and have had many failures but I am pleased with this one..." Now sadly our Edward too has gone... to continue his journey. He is much missed and I will always remember his kindness and charm.

I first met Cecily Walker in June 1971 when she came to my bookshop in Selborne. Myfanwy had told me that she was a great Walker - in more ways than one - and a Sussex Downsman. And, from the Birthday Walk in 1974 - which happened to actually fall on March the third - she was a regular walker and, later on, also on the Autumn Walks until well into her eighties. She also enjoyed other literary events. I can still see her at a gathering, in a gypsy setting in Selborne, to mark the centenary of George Borrow's birth - for hadn't her uncle once written a book on Gypsy Borrow? In 1983 Cecily was co-leader with me on the Birthday Walk over the hills to the White Horse, the subject of Edward's first poem 'Up in the Wind'. And in 1987 she was on the Shoulder of Mutton with her brother Edward and sister Elizabeth for the dedication of a seat there. And in Westminster Abbey at the dedication of the memorial to thirteen poets of the First World War.

Travelling generally by public transport or on foot Cecily nevertheless always looked elegant and composed...and had a lovely smile. I remember her with affection, as I do also her late brother Edward Eastaway - and now sadly also her other brother David, who died at Christmas.

Like Cecily, David Tyacke, was another strong and energetic walker. He was an original member of the committee who I had 'sounded out' very discreetly in conversation

on our last March walk, in memory of Edward, prior to the formation of the Fellowship in the autumn of 1980. David himself had discovered the commemorative walk a few years earlier. Recognizable by his distinguished military bearing, dapper appearance and courteous manner, I shall always remember my first meeting with him. We had got into step on one of the early pre-Fellowship walks and talked of Edward's - now often quoted - answer to Eleanor Farjeon's question, as to why he had enlisted in the First World War, picking up a handful of earth and saying "simply for this". It all seemed to make sense, there on the Shoulder of Mutton with that breathtaking view. (I learnt later that David's father had also served, and was killed in the First World War).

In 1984 David, and Frances Guthrie, led the Birthday Walk to South Harting, where Edward's friend James Guthrie - Frances's great uncle - had lived in the days before the First World War when Edward often walked over from Steep, to visit him.

Strangely enough, it was some years later, while remembering another old friend of Edward's - W H Hudson - on a pilgrimage to Itchen Abbas, where Hudson often stayed, I unexpectedly saw David again - and it was to be for the last time. We were both lunching - he with his family - at a small pub on the banks of the Itchen. Charming as ever, David greeted me and asked of news of the Fellowship (for some years, for family reasons, he had not been able to be an active member). I wondered if he remembered those early committee days when he nobly, and in silence must have suffered my somewhat unorthodox chairmanship! I blush now at the memory. I shall always remember with much gratitude his considerable contribution to the Fellowship. As Richard wrote in the last Newsletter "he was a good guide during the early years and his advice was always important and useful".

Memories of a different kind come back when I think of my two other lady founder-friends. Their lives are recalled with gratitude for their contributions to the 'heart' of the Fellowship. That certain something which Myfanwy referred to in her first Welcome message.

Jill Balcon was one of Myfanwy's special friends for she had known her mother Helen. And Jill lived in Steep. When Jill wrote to me she would sign herself 'Steep Jill' and she always addressed me as 'Anne o' Selborne'. It was something we shared and I treasure those postcards written in her distinctive, flowing hand.

Steep and Selborne were special places in Jill's life. She was a welcome visitor to my small bookshop in Selborne on many Edward Thomas occasions and at other literary gatherings, which were all enhanced by her wonderful readings. She also took part in 'Spring will come again' in Selborne church in 1997 - an evening programme of Edward's poetry and prose before the Birthday Walk. Memorable occasions every one... in Steep and on the Walks, at Agny and the Imperial War Museum, the Red House... and so many other places. For me, perhaps, the most memorable one was in Steep church in 1978 at the dedication of the Whistler windows installed to commemorate the centenary of Edward's birth. "The weekend was one of the happiest I've ever spent: not only the realization of even more than one had ever hoped for, but the sharing of it with so many congenial, dear people". Jill wrote afterwards. On another occasion her moving reading of a passage from Helen Thomas's 'World without end' had such depth of feeling and emotion that I do no think many of us had a dry eye.

The last short walk I took with Jill, and Stephen Stuart-Smith, - was along Church Road in Steep at the end of the day after her final presence at the Birthday Tribute in the church. I thought of her again in March of last year as I sat in the Wigmore Hall for the memorable recital in words and music in celebration of Jill's life and work and read so many wonderful tributes to her in the fine programme. And I spoke once again to Stephen Stuart-Smith who had known her so well and had, as he recorded, been "soundly counselled and thoroughly spoilt by Jill for twenty-five years". We are all the poorer for her passing.

The Fellowship has also lost a special friend in the death of Vera Holmes of Hawkley, a village at the heart of Edward Thomas's Hampshire homeland. With her

husband Harry, Vera knew intimately and loved the almost secret land of 'cresses from Oakshott rill' and 'cowslips from Wheatham Hill'. I chose this way, between banks of May blossom and cowparsley and the scent of wild ransoms in the beech woods to drop down into Hawkley at the end of May last year, to be present at Harry's tribute to Vera in the village hall which followed her earlier committal in Chichester.

Stephen was present again in Hawkley, for Harry and Vera were also his friends, and Harry had asked him to speak of Vera, for the Fellowship had enjoyed several delightful literary evenings and their generous hospitality at Churchfield over many years and, with his permission I quote Stephen - "It has always been a haven of hospitality, good cheer, meaningful discussion and cultural pleasure... Vera fully shared Harry's enthusiasm for all the arts."

Now Harry too has gone. But in his passing he has left something behind, for in his own writings he has given us the reason for the appreciation of Edward Thomas. "I am drawn, he writes in 'Our Sweetest Songs', especially to certain poets because they say in exquisite form what at best I perceive only fitfully. Edward Thomas is such a poet." And to Harry his association with the Edward Thomas Fellowship was a meaningful part of his life; friends and fellowship were important. "Now", as he wrote in a later chapter of the book, "in each separation there is an ache… I know I have to accept the finality. I know the memories are sweet and the days together are good. But it is hard and the ache will not go away."

And, as Harry remembered his friends for "the whole tenor and activity of their lives", now the memories I have of him bring me their 'warmth and sympathy' on the news of his own passing. My friendship with Harry and Vera was of long standing and our mutual love of the local Hangers area in which we lived – and Edward Thomas immortalised in his poetry – created a bond between us. Now I am left … remembering them with affection and gratitude. They were both kindly supporters of all my endeavours and their encouragement was invaluable.

I first 'met' Alan Martin - who later became the Fellowship's first Honorary Secretary - through a mention of an early pre-Fellowship Edward Thomas Birthday Walk in the Peterborough column of the *Daily Telegraph* in February 1974. Alan wrote a short note to me, as my name had been given in the paper, to say he couldn't join on March 3 but... "I very much treasure a letter from Edward Thomas's daughter and like to accumulate any items of interest in relation to this poet". Other postcards addressed to me followed through the 70s after he had picked up further references to my various literary activities organised from my bookshop in Selborne.

Alan had an insatiable appetite for events and organisation. And by the end of the 70s - and his involvement in arrangements for the 1978 centenary celebrations of Edward Thomas's birth - he became Honorary Secretary of the Edward Thomas Fellowship on its formation in 1980. And my own informal ways of juggling with self-inflicted pressures, constant 'finger on the pulse' concerns and last-minute panics were again confined to the bookshop!

I saw Alan - for what proved to be the last time - in March 2010 when, with other members of the Fellowship I was present at the wonderful Memorial Concert for Jill Balcon in the Wigmore Hall. A most memorable occasion. Afterwards Alan saw me into a taxi in his usual courteous manner. As he waved goodbye I was not to know that we would not meet again otherwise I would have pinned my little silver 'Cross of St George' brooch on my coat. For Alan had nominated me for this *This England* Award in February 1986 (for my rural bygones collection). And he was later, proudly, present in Selborne for the presentation by the editor of the magazine, Roy Faiers. I think Alan would have been pleased that, twenty-five years on I'm recalling the occasion now.

Time passes but memories do not fade. Alan will always be 'unforgettable' to those of us in the Fellowship who remember him. And I shall never forget the hours we spent -

inspired, encouraged and guided by Myfanwy - to create a fellowship founded on walking, friendships and mutual admiration and appreciation of Edward Thomas.

Edward Thomas at the Poet's Stone. Birthday Walk 1982.

Above: Wayfarers on the Way. Cecily (second left), and Vera (standing centre) with Harry (on her left) under signpost. Autumn Walk, South Downs 1986.

Below: Group includes David Tyacke (right), Alan Martin (left) and Harry Holmes (second left).

Jill (with John Westbrook, centre and H. Colin Davis) Steep Church, Whistler window dedication, Centenary Weekend 1978.

Edward Thomas: from Adlestrop to Arras

By Jean Moorcroft Wilson
(from a talk given to the ETF at the Imperial War Museum)

How did Edward Thomas, whose best-known poem, 'Adlestrop' **(1)** is about an unscheduled halt at a deserted country railway-station, come to join the ranks of the greatest First World War poets? Had he, for example, sailed with Robert Frost to America in February 1915, as he seriously considered doing, his life and his work, would have been very different. Instead, in July 1915, after months of indecision, he enlisted and by the end of January 1917 was in France. Just over two months later he was dead, killed on the first day of the Battle of Arras, 9 April 1917. The story of his vacillations before his eventual enlistment is of particular interest, highlighting as it does the myriad different reasons why men like Thomas 'doubting Thomas' finally decided to fight.

Motives for enlisting seem to me especially important in the case of the First World War poets, since they dictate (ultimately) the kind of war poetry each of them writes. An additional interest in the case of Thomas is the fact that his protracted debate about joining the Army overlapped with his turn to verse and forms the subject of a significant number of his poems, both at the time and retrospectively. Poems like 'The Bridge', for instance, written in early March 1915, can be read simply as an insight into a particular state of mind, or more specifically, as a moment when Thomas was arriving at his lonely decision to leave family and friends to serve his country. Either way, the symbolism is highly effective.**(2)**

During the long, hot summer of 1914 which preceded the War none of the major First World War poets, with the possible exception of Julian Grenfell, who was already a professional soldier, or Rupert Brooke, who had close links to Winston Churchill (through Churchill's private Secretary, Edward Marsh) could imagine how dramatically life would change for all of them when War was declared at midnight on 3 August 1914.

Siegfried Sassoon was living the life of a fashionable young man in London, being drawn nightly to the Russian Ballet and opera, like Rupert Brooke, newly-returned from an exotic trip to the South Seas. Charles Hamilton Sorley was walking peacefully in the Moselle Valley after a seven-month stay in Germany absorbing her culture and language. Edmund Blunden was still a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital. Robert Graves was waiting to take up a scholarship at Oxford, as was Vera Brittain, also enjoying (in her own words) a 'perfect summer idyll', falling in love with her brother's friend, Roland Leighton (who, like her brother and their two other close friends, would be killed in the War). Julian Grenfell was 'lov[ing] the Profession of Arms' as a British officer serving in South Africa. And the poet who would prove the least 'professional' soldier of them all, Isaac Rosenberg, was also by coincidence in South Africa. Wilfred Owen was working as a private tutor in the foothills of the Pyrenees. And Thomas himself was looking forward to a month in Gloucestershire with his new American friend, Robert Frost, who would galvanize him into poetry. Yet only Blunden, not quite eighteen, and Thomas, who at thirty-six was the oldest of the well-known war poets and a married man with three children, were not expected to volunteer at the outset.

Sassoon enlisted the day *before* and Graves, Brooke and Sorley (reluctantly) all accepted that it was their duty to defend their country, a belief instilled in them at the public schools most had attended. Of those of fighting age only Rosenberg, still in South Africa, and Owen, still in south-west France, resisted. Grenfell, already a professional soldier as we've seen, expressed the mood of many at the start when he wrote home to his family:

> And don't you think it has been a wonderful and almost incredible rally to the Empire; with Redmond and the Hindus and Will Crooks and the Boers and the South Fiji Islanders all aching

> to come and throw stones at the Germans. It reinforces one's failing belief in the Old Flag and the Mother Country and the Heavy Brigade and the Thin Red Line, and all the Imperialist Idea, which gets rather shadowy in peacetime, don't you think?**(3)**

Far from regarding themselves as victims, robbed of their education or of promising careers, most of the first batch of war poets echo such sentiments, reflecting the feeling of the country at large. It was a mood perfectly captured in Brooke's immensely popular '1914' sonnet sequence, 'Peace', in particular:

> Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
> And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
> With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
> To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
> Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
> Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
> And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary, . . .
> And all the little emptiness of love!**(4)**

Britain's small expeditionary force of mainly professional soldiers dismissed by the Kaiser as 'contemptible' created a need for large reinforcements at the beginning of August 1914 and, on the whole, the country responded fervently. Some people, like Sassoon, volunteered even before War was officially declared. And when Kitchener made his famous public appeal for more men on 7 August, they flooded into makeshift recruiting offices at the rate of 1,500 a day. (The final figure would be a formidable 2.4 million.)

Motives for enlisting varied widely. Frederic Manning joined the British Army as a private soldier and in his subsequent novel, a thinly-disguised autobiography entitled *Her Privates We* (1930), he gives some of the reasons his fellow-soldiers advanced for enlisting.

When the vociferously-complaining 'Weeper' Smart, for instance, is asked 'What the ell' he 'came out for' then he replies:

> 'That's where th'ast got me beat lad,' he admitted. 'When a saw all them as didn' know any better'n we did joinin' up, an' a went walkin out wi' me girl on Sundays, as usual, a just felt ashamed. An' a put it away, an' a put it away, until in th' end it got me down. I knew what it'd be, but it got the better o' me, an' then, like a bloody fool, a went an' joined up too. A were ashamed to be seen walkin' in the streets, a were. But a tell thee, now, that if a were once out o' these togs an' in civvies again, a wouldn't mind all the shame in the world; no, not if I ad to slink through all the back streets, an' didn't dare put my nose in t' Old Vaults again.**(5)**

Whereas the tougher Glazier suggests a different scenario, though no specific motive. 'Short, stocky, and ruddy like Madeley,' Manning writes, 'he was of coarser grain, with an air of brutality that the other lacked: the kind of man who, when he comes to grips, kills and grunts with pleasure in killing':

> Why should us'ns fight an' be killed for all them bloody slackers at ome? It ain't right. No matter what they say, it ain't right. We're doin' our duty, an' they ain't, an' they're coinin' money while we get ten bloody frong [i.e. francs] a week. They don't care a blow about us. Once we're in the army, they've got us by the short airs. Talk about discipline! They don't try disciplinin' any o' them muckin' civvies, do they? We want to put some o' them bloody politicians in the front line, an' see em shelled to shit. That'd buck their ideas up.**(6)**

And the more reasonable Madeley explains:

> I'm not fightin' for a lot o' bloody civvies . . . I'm fightin' for myself an' me own folk. It's all bloody fine sayin' let them as made the war fight it. 'twere Germany made the war . . . An' I'd

> rather come an' fight Fritz in France than 'ave im come over to Blighty an' start bashin' our 'ouses about, same as e's done 'ere [i.e. in France] **(7)**

As Glazier rather bluntly puts it, 'the Fritzes 'ad to be stopped', a point on which they all appear to agree.

As I've already suggested, the majority of war poets, who came largely from the middle-classes, enlisted out of a sense of duty to their country, inculcated in them by their mainly public school education. Why then did Thomas *not* enlist at the start? After all, there were plenty of men beyond the recognized fighting age who did? For example, R.E. Vernède. Between early August 1914 and mid-July 1915, when he finally entered a recruiting office, Thomas gives various reasons for *not* enlisting: others we can guess at. Most frequently, it was that he couldn't leave his wife and children. On 3 September 1914, for instance, he writes to a close friend: 'I should join the Territorials if it didn't mean asking others to keep my family'.**(8)** Yet, ironically, when he did finally enlist, one reason he would give would be his need to support his family with his soldier's pay, after his application for a Civil List Pension had failed by June 1915. And his justification for volunteering for service abroad (where he stood a much greater chance of being killed) was that he would get higher pay to send home to his wife. Some critics believe that the real reason was the pronounced suicidal tendency he suffered periodically throughout his life.

Another reason he gave, was his plan to join Frost in America. Only a month before he enlisted he was writing to the poet Gordon Bottomley: 'Now I am going to cycle and think of man and nature and human life and decide between enlisting or going to America before I enlist'.**(9)**

And to begin with one very reasonable argument he put forward for not enlisting was that there was probably work he could do more effectively than fighting. After suggesting an article on 'War Poetry' to Harold Monro, the editor of *Poetry and Drama*, for instance, he adds: 'I am still looking for work I can do better perhaps than soldiering'.**(10)**

There were other explanations for not joining up, his dislike of crowds and, uncertainty, or the lack of a friend with whom to enlist, for example, but one reason he did *not* give, but which almost certainly prevented him from volunteering sooner, was his fear of failing the medical examination. Though an exceptionally fit man for his age, there is no denying that he had a tendency towards hypochondria, especially in his recurrent depressive phases. And there was one extended period in early 1915 when he twisted his ankle so badly, he could not, literally, have walked into the recruiting office!

Then, most powerfully of all in my opinion, was his dislike of jingoism. But to examine that properly we need to go back to the beginning, to August 1914, which will also help explain why Thomas eventually enlisted. As you will see, he varied between a Hamlet-like indecisiveness and a Micawberish attitude of 'something will turn up'.

When Edward Thomas set off with his son, Merfyn, on 3 August 1914 to cycle to Gloucestershire to visit Frost, War had not yet been declared. It seemed, at the start, a typical August Bank Holiday Monday with everyone out enjoying the sun. But when they broke their journey at Swindon, the evening newspapers were full of War's imminence. And after it was officially declared on Germany the next day, the effects were immediately apparent. The need for large numbers of volunteers to supplement Britain's small, professional army, created havoc with all the usual symptoms of transport and communication, for instance, as Thomas's wife, Helen, discovered when she set off to join Edward in Gloucestershire with their two young daughters and a Russian pupil from their school who had been refused permission to leave the country. It was not until the early hours of the following morning that she and the children managed to join Thomas.

Given the dramatic situation, there are curiously few references to the War by Thomas during this period, though he did admit to a close friend, Eleanor Farjeon, on 2 August that while 'busy getting ready' to leave on holiday, the family had been 'talking rubbish about

War'.**(11)** By this date the immediate causes of the conflict had been building up for more than a month, and as a History Scholar from Oxford, Thomas might have been expected to be aware of this. Yet he seems to have been more interested in the prospect of discussing poetry with Frost. In one of his few allusions to the political situation in the same 2 August letter to Eleanor, for example, he refers to it only as a possible incentive for him to turn to verse in his mid-thirties:

> I am a little at a loose end after sending off *A Literary Pilgrim*]i.e. a commissioned prose work] yesterday. Who will want the thing now. I may as well write poetry. Did anyone ever begin at 36 in the shade?**(12)**

Part of the explanation for his apparent indifference, which continued throughout his August holiday in Gloucestershire, may be geographical. Had Thomas been in London on 4 August 1914, it would have been virtually impossible for him *not* to be more involved. But at Leadington, deep in the Gloucestershire countryside, there were as yet few signs that England was at war. Apart from his wife's dawn arrival on 5 August there and her grilling by the local policeman over the obviously foreign Russian boy in her charge, the immediate effects were largely indirect, sometimes quite comical. Thomas told Eleanor Farjeon, for instance, that 'Frost's immediate reaction to the war was the feeling . . . that he must provide for the duration'**(13)** and Helen Thomas remembered the walls of the Frosts' rather bare living-room being 'stacked up with ramparts of shredded wheat packets, tins of rather cheap sugary biscuits and boxes of highly scented soap'.**(14)** The locals were sanguine about the outcome of the conflict, according to Eleanor Farjeon who joined them later in the month, but nevertheless very wary of 'anything or anyone unaccountable . . . the chink of light between the curtains, the unfamiliar accent of a stranger'.**(15)** To begin with, Frost's New Hampshire intonation had been suspect and Thomas noted that 'some of the natives had thrown stones at [Frost's] windows, deciding he must be a Hun'.**(16)** After receiving several anonymous letters the local policeman had finally interviewed Frost, who was furious. In a reversal of their later reactions to his brush with an officious gamekeeper, Thomas was merely amused and the holiday atmosphere returned. The only other way in which the War made itself felt in the first half of August was that it delayed Eleanor Farjeon's arrival.

Otherwise the Thomases and the Frosts spent idle days: 'talk and strolling and odd games of cricket' filled most of them, according to Edward. While Germany swept relentlessly through Belgium into France in the opening days of the War, the two families and their numerous children might be at the Frosts' cottage, trying to remember the words of folk-songs like 'Mr John Blunt' or 'Au Jardin de mon père'.

As the Battle of the Frontiers in Alsace and Lorraine approached on 14 August, life still seems to have continued uneventfully for the little Gloucestershire community. Almost everything Thomas wrote about his time with Frost that August has a touch of the Garden of Eden, or Arcadia, about it. There is only a hint in his poem on that period, 'The Sun Used to Shine' that, in the poem's own words, 'rumours of the war remote' might bring the idyll to an end.

It was not all as perfect as it sounded, of course. (Perhaps it never is!) Helen Thomas appears to have been rather critical of Frost's wife, another 'Elinor', and, more seriously, by the middle of the month, Thomas himself was distinctly irritable. He was not used to living with his family in such cramped quarters. The first long holiday he had taken with them for several years, he was unable to escape to London for the night, as he did regularly at home, or leave on one of his extensive research trips for a topographical book. He couldn't even get away to Wales for a week with Frost as planned. For by mid-August the War was beginning to make itself felt even in dozy Leadington. Mr Chandler, the Thomas's forty-four year-old landlord and a soldier of twenty-one years' service, had been 'sent for to Hereford', as he put it,**(17)** on 14 August and Thomas and Frost might have to take on some of his work on

the farm. Even without that there were other problems attached to taking a week off in Wales. As Thomas explained to a sympathetic Eleanor, still planning her arrival, 'travelling has new inconveniences and things cost even more than ever here, so I don't know what they'll be at inns'.**(18)** Of one thing only he was sure at this point, that he had no intention of 'serving his country'.**(19)**

Instead he contemplated 'turning plain reporter and giving *unvarnished* [my italics] reports of country conversations about the war'.**(20)** Two things prevented him, however: the first was Frost's active discouragement, which is rather puzzling in view of the American's somewhat bellicose attitude towards the Germans: 'I like the war and the idea of abolishing Prussia', he wrote to a friend at home on 20 August 1914.**(21)** The second reason Thomas hesitated to 'turn plain reporter and give unvarnished reports . . . about war' was that he suspected that 'varnish' was precisely what the public wanted. 'Do you read Harold Begbie, for example?' he asked Eleanor Farjeon. (Begbie was a journalist, a popular writer on religious and social issues, whom Thomas may have met in the offices of *The Daily Chronicle*, for which he regularly reviewed.) Even a short extract from Begbie's poem, 'Fall In', published that month in the *Chronicle*, makes it clear what Thomas meant by 'varnish':

> . . . Why do they call, sonny, why do they call
> For men who are brave and strong?
> Is it naught to you if your country fall,
> And Right is smashed by Wrong?
> Is it football still and the picture show,
> The pub and the betting odds,
> When your brothers stand to the tyrants' blow
> And Britain's call is God's?**(22)**

'What a low fiend Begbie is', Thomas wrote to the poet John Freeman, almost certainly in response to this poem.**(23)** If Begbie was the first example of a war poet Thomas encountered, it is not surprising that he appears to have, consciously or unconsciously, avoided the genre when he started to write poetry himself shortly afterwards. And Begbie's jingoistic appeal to Englishmen in the name of God was by no means an isolated example of the kind of verse produced at the outbreak of War. Such outpourings may even have delayed Thomas's own start in verse: he is anxious to point out to Gordon Bottomley that by 25 August he is still '*not* writing poems [about it] like all those London bards' [my italics]. He found them 'particularly wretched on the whole, except those done quite deliberately like Begbie's and they are even more hateful'.**(24)** It was Begbie and his fellow-jingoists, like Thomas's own father, who would provoke him into writing the nearest he ever came to a direct war-poem, 'This is no case of petty right or wrong', setting out his own more measured approach to the conflict **(25).** John Pikoulis, a normally perceptive critic, has accused Thomas of being 'more than a little sentimental' in this poem:**(26)** if so, it is a rare lapse on Thomas's part. In any event, 'This is no case', as Bernard Bergonzi points out, 'evidences an awareness far removed from' such straightforwardly patriotic poems as Grenfell's 'Into Battle', or Brooke's '1914' sonnet sequence.**(27)** It is an awareness relating to the countryside Thomas knew and loved so well and hinges on the distinction, in William Cooke's words, 'between subtle (private) patriotism and deliberate (public) patriotism',**(28)** a distinction Thomas himself made. You may know Eleanor Farjeon's account of his response when she asked him, while out walking in the country with him: 'Do you know what you are fighting for?:

> He stopped, & picked up a pinch of earth. 'Literally, for this' [he said]. He crumbled it between finger and thumb, & let it fall.**(29)**

Far from being 'sentimental', or rhetorical, as Pikoulis suggests in 'This is no case', Thomas appears to be questioning himself with his usual rigour on possible reasons for enlisting. And what more convincing argument could there be in his case than his long-standing love of English landscapes ('the storm smoking along the wind / Athwart the wood') and her literature ('God save England', he echoes from one of Shakespeare's most patriotic plays, *Henry V*, though he does also conjure up the witches' 'cauldron' from *Macbeth* to convey the evil of war, perhaps.)

'This is no case' would not be written down until fourteen months after the outbreak of War, but it rehearses many of Thomas's arguments with himself on the question. Whilst it may be argued that it was the War itself which provided the final impetus towards poetry, he had more immediate concerns about its likely effects in mid-August 1914. Despite feeling, in his own words, 'more secluded here from realities than ever',**(30)** after Mr Chandler's call-up, their landlady, Mrs Chandler, had been forced to raise their supposedly fixed terms for board and money was becoming an issue. Yet Thomas was 'getting no work' and could see no likelihood of any, as a flurry of letters between himself and his literary agent, Frank Cazenove, shows. Frost's suggestion that he produce a collection of prose sketches ('call it "Thick and Clear", Thomas joked) failed to appeal to Cazenove. But his agent did like Thomas's proposal of 'a series of country rides . . . to relate solely to the war's influence'**(31)** and within a week was able to report some interest in it, from Austin Harrison of *The English Review*. Thomas then travelled briefly to London to debate terms with Harrison, who agreed to pay £25 for 5,000 words.

Helen Thomas was both relieved and delighted by what were very reasonable terms. But Edward's relations with her were so bad by this point that, according to Frost, 'her enthusiasm and optimism irritated him'**(32)** when they met him at the local station, Ledbury, on his return from London. Helen had insisted on Frost coming with her and he remembered how the three of them walked back to Leadington, 'strung out in a row along the road, Thomas and his wife trying to avoid each other'.**(33)** Frost believed that Helen's 'emotion was too lush for [Edward] and irritated him' beyond his usual irratibility, driving him on one occasion at least to throw a teapot at the wall.**(34)** If, as seems likely, Edward's poem, 'No one so much as you', is really about Helen, not his mother as he claimed, then his own perception of their differences makes the gap between them seem quite unbridgeable, since the narrator concludes this poem by emphasizing the vast space between them, viewing himself and her, respectively, as 'A pine in solitude / Cradling a dove'.**(35)** Frost may not have been far wrong when he later argued that one of Thomas's motives for enlisting had been to get away from his wife.

Thomas left Leadington on 26/27 August, at least a week earlier than originally planned. His premature departure may have been prompted by a letter from his agent setting out final details for *The English Review* article. Cazenove's stern reminder that 'nothing must be said [in it] which will stop recruiting', was probably not necessary, since Thomas himself was already beginning to identify a great deal more with the Allied cause than at War's outbreak. The British Expeditionary Force had fought its first two serious engagements of the War, the Battle of Mons on 23 August and Le Cateau on the 26th, and news of their retreat on both occasions would have reached Thomas, even in Leadington, by 27 August. As *The Times* warned on 26 August, the fighting had 'so far gone ill' for the British, who were retreating, exhausted, from the Germans eastward of the Meuse. Thomas's reaction to the news that same evening, as he walked with Frost under a 'stout orange' harvest moon, reveals him confronting his own indecision about enlisting, possibly for the first time:

> . . . At one stroke, I thought, like many other people, what things that same new moon sees eastward about the Meuse in France. Of those who could see it there, not blinded by smoke, pain or excitement, how many saw it and heeded? I was deluged, in a second stroke, by another thought, or something that overpowered thought. All I can tell is, it seemed to me that either I

> had never loved England, or that I had loved it foolishly, aesthetically, like a slave, not having realized that it was not mine unless I were willing and prepared to die rather than to leave it as Belgian women and old men and children had left their country. Something I had omitted. Something, I felt, had to be done before I could look composedly at English landscape, at the elms and poplars about the houses, at the purple-headed wood-betony with two pairs of dark leaves on a stiff stem, who stood sentinel among the grasses or bracken by hedge-side or wood's-edge. What he stood sentinel for I did not know, any more than what I had got to do.**(36)**

The sentinel-like betony would appear again in the poem Thomas later wrote about this moment of revelation under the harvest moon, together with the so-called'autumn' crocuses (colchicums) he had also seen on his walks with Frost in August 1914.

> The sun used to shine while we two walked
> Slowly together, paused and started
> Again, and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
> As either pleased, and cheerfully parted
>
> Each night. We never disagreed
> Which gate to rest on. The to be
> And the late past we gave small heed.
> We turned from men or poetry
>
> To rumours of the war remote
> Only till both stood disinclined
> For aught but the yellow flavorous coat
> Of an apple wasps had undermined;
>
> Or a sentry of dark betonies,
> The stateliest of small flowers on earth,
> At the forest verge; or crocuses
> Pale purple as if they had their birth
>
> In sunless Hades fields. . . .**(37)**

Both betonies and crocuses would become in 'The Sun Used to Shine' faint symbols of the battlefield he envisaged, the betonies standing guard over the troops, the crocuses 'Pale purple as if they had their birth / In sunless Hades fields'. The latter reference is, as Edna Longley points out, a reversal of the Persephone myth, in which the goddess returns from Hades' underworld every spring, Thomas's crocuses implying ironically, perhaps, that the soldiers who die in autumn 1914 will *not,* unlike Persephone, return to life. The moon, too, becomes symbolic, indicating the shared humanity of the narrator with the soldiers, as he struggles to travel imaginatively to the Front, ultimately in vain:

> . . . The war
> Came back to mind with the moonrise
> Which soldiers in the east afar
> Beheld then. Nevertheless, our eyes
>
> Could as well imagine the Crusades
> Or Caesar's battles. Everything
> To faintness like those rumours fades
> Like the brook's water glittering
>
> Under the moonlight like those walks
> Now like us two that took them, and

The fallen apples, all the talks
And silences like memory's sand

When the tide covers it late or soon,
And other men through other flowers
In these fields under the same moon
Go talking and have easy hours.**(38)**

Written in May 1916, almost a year after Thomas himself became a soldier, 'The Sun used to Shine' may also be an anticipation of his death less than a year after that. The sudden shift in the last two stanzas from the past to a very different present and a future in which 'other men through other flowers' will walk and talk appears to equate the narrator with 'the fallen apples' or 'memory's sand / When the tide covers it'.

Thomas left on his fortnight's research trip for 'Tipperary' (as his first article for *The English Review* would be called) the day after his revelatory moonlight walk with Frost, and what he encountered during his travels almost certainly reinforced his sense that he ought to 'do' something for his country. For he now felt that *England* (rather than his parents' birthplace *Wales*, as previously) *was* his country. By the end of August he was able to write to his friend, the poet Walter de la Mare, 'If the war goes on I believe I shall find myself a sort of Englishman . . .'**(39)** Significantly this letter had opened with a reference to Rupert Brooke having joined the Army, since rivalry with Brooke, perhaps also with the philosopher-poet, T.E. Hulme, would almost certainly influence his final decision to enlist.

Thomas's itinerary for 'Tipperary', through Coventry, Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester, Bradford, Leeds, Hartlepool, Sunderland and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was clearly planned to enable him to establish how the ordinary 'man in the street' was reacting to the War. A great deal of his time was spent 'in pubs talking to workmen and eavesdropping',**(40)** Thomas told Bottomley, and the result, an unusually early example of 'vox pop' or 'mass observation', is an invaluable record of popular feeling about the War at its start. He learnt a great many interesting facts about recruitment and employment in particular, some of them quite unexpected. Whilst it was no surprise to learn that there was lack of work in trades like jewelry-making in Birmingham, for example, it was less predictable that the coalminers of Newcastle, for instance, had suffered from unemployment because their colliery had supplied coal to Germany before the War. (Many of the unemployed workers had enlisted and some ultra-patriotic employers, Thomas heard, were deliberately dismissing younger, unmarried men 'in order to drive them to enlist'.)

Other industries flourished. Bootmakers in Leicester, for instance, were so busy making boots for the British and French armies, that they had to turn down a substantial order to supply the Greek army with them. The harness-makers of Walsall were overwhelmed with work, as, of course, were the explosive factories of Elswick. But only the publicans really profited, since, in general, everyone had to work harder for less pay.

It was not just the pubs which were crowded, Thomas found. The streets, parks and other public places were 'thronged . . . bands played in the streets at Newcastle bagpipes to quicken recruiting'.**(41)** Football matches, too, were a favourite recruiting spot. And though the War was not discussed publicly, you were branded a 'Socialist' if you did so, Thomas seems to have had no difficulty in getting people to talk to him openly about other related topics. A Coventry man, for instance, argued that the working classes 'were doing their duty, but not the middle class, he called it the "second class", "these young fellows who are neither man nor girl, and think about their socks all day"'. Opinions on the enemy were also forthcoming and varied surprisingly, from those who maintained that 'the Germans are a rotten lot' to those who admired 'German strategy and organization'. One youth at Manchester even dared to suggest that 'they must be a fine race of soldiers' and a Coventry man went so far as to argue that 'the German people were as good as ourselves'. Yet this man, like everyone else, Thomas found, 'was sure of victory' and no one could 'stomach the

idea of English soldiers retiring and retiring', as they had appeared to do at Mons and Le Cateau. Predictably, patriotic feeling ran high and scores of people believed it was 'the greatest War of all time'. There is little doubt that such widespread and heartfelt patriotism from ordinary men and women strengthened Thomas's own increasing identification with England. A week into his trip he was writing to a friend: 'The obvious thing is to join the Territorials'.**(42)** He also repeated his belief that he was 'slowly growing into a conscious Englishman'.

The War for Thomas, like almost everyone else, had thrown everything into disarray and he seems to have drawn consolation from the one certain employment he had in writing about it. He took particular relish in reporting the many rumours and legends that circulated. Some of them were entertainingly absurd, such as the story that two million Russians had travelled down secretly through England by night and were waiting for the Germans at Ostend.

Despite the undoubted influence of this trip on Thomas, he remained uncertain as to his own course of action. Four days after he sent in his article, 'Tipperary', to *The English Review*, he could still write to Frost on 19 September 1914, with reference to their last walk under a new moon:

> I doubt if I shall get any nearer soldiering than I did then, chiefly for fear of leaving many tangles behind and not being able to make any new ones for perhaps a long time. So I shall probably see you before the year [i.e. 1914]'s old.

And it was as a result of this last visit to Frost, which took place in mid-October, together with a taunt from his friend Ralph Hodgson about being pro-German in November 1914, that Thomas's last incentive to enlist was put in place, though it would take him nearly another nine months to make the final decision.

Though Frost would later tell his grand-daughter that he believed Thomas had enlisted to get away from his wife, Elinor Frost always maintained that Thomas's motives had been a more complex mix of love of country and desire to do 'the right thing'.**(43)** She also agreed with Frost that Thomas had joined up partly 'to prove his courage', which he felt had failed him in an incident involving Frost. The two men, on one of their many walks together in Gloucestershire that October had encountered a local gamekeeper and Frost's response to being ordered off Lord Beauchamp's land as 'a damned cottager' had been angry and confrontational. This had elicited a summons for alleged threats of bodily harm from the police, but the situation had eventually calmed down. Thomas's unwillingness to back his friend at the time, however, informed no doubt by a greater recognition of the complex English class-system, had left him suspecting that he was a coward. Frost remembered that Thomas's letters to him from France, some of them inexplicably lost, spoke repeatedly of his need to test his courage which he believed had failed him in the gamekeeper episode.

Hodgson's 'pro-German' taunt less than a month later, i.e. 9 November 1914, reinforced Thomas's need to prove his courage, I believe, a suspicion aroused by another of Thomas's poems bearing on his enlistment, 'There Was a Time' **(44)**.

Which, of the many reasons I have suggested, was the one which finally propelled Thomas into a recruiting office in mid-July 1915? Thomas was almost certainly thinking of himself when he warned us of the impossibility of ever really knowing why a person makes that final, and in Thomas's case, fatal, decision to enlist:

> A man enlists for some inexplicable reason which he may translate into simple, conventional terms. If he has thought a good deal about it, he has made a jump at some point, beyond the reach of his thought. The articulate and the inarticulate are united in the ranks at this moment by the power to make that jump and come to the extreme decision.**(45)**

Notes :

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1. Edna Longley (ed.), *Edward Thomas: the Annotated Collected Poems*. Bloodaxe Books, 2008, p. 51 [ACP].
2. ibid., p. 66.
3. Quoted in *Julian Grenfell* by Viola Meynell (reprinted from *The Dublin Review*), London, Burns & Oates, 1917, taken from *Pages from a Family Journal, 1888-1915*, edited by Ettie Desborough. Eton College, 1916.
4. Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke*. London, Faber & Faber, 1960, p. 19.
5. Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We*. London, Peter Davies, 1964, p. 166.
6. ibid., p. 166.
7. ibid., pp. 166-7.
8. Edward Thomas [E.T.] to Gordon Bottomley [G.B.], 3 September 1914. University of Wales, Cardiff.
9. ibid., 18 June 1915.
10. E.T. to Harold Monro, 19 September 1914. University of Buffalo, N.Y.
11. E.T.'s letters to Eleanor Farjeon [E.F.] are at Battersea Public Library, London.
12. E.T. had turned thirty-six in March 1914.
13. Eleanor Farjeon, *Edward Thomas, the Last Four Years* [LFY], O.U.P., 1979, p. 87.
14. 'Robert Frost', *PN Review*, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 22.
15. LFY., p. 87.
16. ibid.
17. E.T. to E.F., 14 August 1914.
18. ibid.
19. ibid.
20. ibid.
21. Robert Frost to Sidney Cox, 20 August 1914, Dartmouth College [DC], New Hampshire.
22. *The Daily Chronicle*, 31 August 1914: the poem was reprinted next day in response to public enthusiasm. See Dominic Hibberd and John Onions (eds), *The Poetry of the Great War*. London, Macmillan, 1986, p. 190 for further details.
23. Letter of 14 August 1914, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
24. E.T. to Harold Monro [H.M.], 14 September 1914, Buffalo.
25. ACP., pp. 104-5.
26. Jonathan Barker (ed.), 'Edward Thomas as War Poet' in *The Art of Edward Thomas*, Poetry Wales Press, 1987, p. 123.
27. Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: a Study of the Literature of the Great War*. London, Constable, 1965.
28. *Edward Thomas: a Critical Biography*. London, Faber & Faber, 1970.
29. LFY., p. 29.
30. E.T. to John Freeman [J.F.], 14 August 1914, Berg.
31. Frank Cazenove to E.T., 17 August 1914 and 19 August 1914, Abbott Collection, University of Durham Library.
32. E.F., 'Talking with Robert Frost', (p. 2) some unpublished notes, parts of which were later rewritten and included in her Foreword to *You Came Too*, London, The Bodley Head, 1964, kindly shown to the author by Anne Harvey.
33. R.P. Eckert, *Edward Thomas, a Biography and Bibliography*, London, J.M. Dent, 1937, p. 146. Eckert had interviewed Frost before writing this book, so was presumably repeating what Frost had told him.
34. E.F., 'Talking with Robert Frost'.
35. ACP., p. 111.
36. E.T., *The Last Sheaf*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1928, p. 221.
37. ACP., p. 122.
38. ibid.
39. Letter of 30 August 1914, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
40. E.T. to G.B., 3 September 1914, Cardiff.
41. This and all following quotations are from 'Tipperary', *The English Review*, October 1914, unless otherwise indicated.
42. E.T. to W.H. Hudson, 3 September 1914, private collection.
43. Lesley Lee Francis, in an interview with the author.
44. ACP., p. 128.
45. 'Tipperary', op.cit.

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The Edward Thomas Memorial Stone
Shoulder of Mutton Hill, Steep
By Colin G. Thornton

How many times have you climbed the Shoulder of Mutton hill gasping for breath, and, as you supported your weary body against the memorial stone, thought how did this get here? After one particularly arduous climb with the wind and mist swirling around me, I paused for thought on this very question and determined that I would find the answer. Of course most Fellowship members are aware that the stone was unveiled by Lord Horder, but how did the stone get there, where did it come from, who paid for it and who organized the project?

Original Idea

The original idea for some form of a memorial to Edward Thomas came from Rowland Watson in 1936. A committee was formed which comprised of: Lascelles Abercrombie, Clifford Bax, Jesse Berridge, R. F. Cholmeley, Walter de la Mare, Wilfred Dudeney, Eleanor Farjeon, Wilfred Gibson, J. W. Haines, Ian MacAlister, Irene McArthur, John Moore, Henry W. Nevinson, William Rothenstein, Julian Thomas, Merfyn Thomas, Andrew Young. Rowland L. Watson was appointed to be the secretary. A letter appeared within the columns of The Times newspaper dated 2nd March 1936 appealing for funds to provide a memorial to Edward Thomas, the signatories included the Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, David Lloyd George, the Poet Laureate John Masefield, Henry W. Nevinson, G.K. Chesterton and Walter de la Mare. It was accompanied by a leading article commending this appeal to all lovers of Edward Thomas's poems and other writings.

The Stone's Original Site

After many discussions and proposals by the committee, it was decided to transport a sarsen stone from Avebury and erect it in a district associated with him. A letter from T. Raddon Hood a solicitor in Calne to Rowland Watson on the 15th February 1937, gave some advice as to how best to go about procuring the stone.

Dear Sir,

Edward Thomas.

Thank you for your letter. I heard from Mr Jack Haines some days ago that you would be getting in touch with me.

I have spoken to Mr Keiller today and he will be very pleased to let you have a sarsen stone. His only query was whether your committee thought it wise to erect a sarsen stone in a part of the country which geographically is foreign to them. However after considering the geological maps he told me that there was no local stone suitable at Petersfield and therefore a sarsen is as suitable as anything else.

He has suggested to me that you might like to come to Avebury and select your own stone. If such would be the case would you get in touch with him at Avebury Manor, Marlborough?
A stone could be procured fairly near a highway and Mr Keiller's archaeological gang of men would raise it and bring it down to the road – a feat that can only be undertaken by trained men. It would probably cost the committee something for the men's time plus perhaps £1 for the farmer on whose land the stone was situate.

If there is any more help I can give you I shall be happy to do so.

Mr Keiller's assistant archaeologist Mr Stuart Piggott lives near Petersfield and seemed to know all about the fund.

Yours very truly
T. Raddon Hood

A letter dated 21st February 1937 from Alexander Keiller the director of the Morven Institute of Archaeological Research shows how things would progress.

The Manor
Avebury
Wiltshire
21st February 1937

Dear Mr Watson,

I should like to thank you for your very kind letter of the 15th.

I am afraid that you are under a slight misapprehension as regards my undertaking to Mr T. Raddon Hood. There is no question of my "giving a sarsen stone" for use for the Edward Thomas Memorial, with which memorial, if I may say so, I am very warmly in sympathy both as regards its object and likewise the form which it is proposed that it shall take.

Unfortunately on no land which I possess in North Wiltshire, (and such land as belongs to me consists of separate parcels, small in extent and widely scattered, selected solely – apart from the house and gardens at the above address – on account of the archaeological interest therewith connected and the consequent necessity for adequate preservation) exists any sarsen stones other than those of course which at one time formed a part of the megalithic monument known to us by the general term of "The Avebury Complex"; i.e. the Circles at Avebury itself and the line of the megalithic avenue leading from Overton Hill to those Circles.

Consequently I cannot of course present the sarsen stone to the memorial, but when Mr Hood brought the matter to my notice and asked for my co-operation, I offered to take any representative of the Committee – for example yourself – to any sites in the near vicinity where sarsen stones lay in their natural position, and from which the removal of one would not detract from the interest or amenities of the countryside at that point, in order that such representative of that committee might select whichever sarsen he considered to be most suitable as regards size and shape for the purpose.

Negotiations for obtaining a sarsen can then take place between the representative of the Committee and the owner of the land upon which the stone lay, which, should the stone be satisfactorily chosen with this idea in view, should actually result in the farmer or other landowner being very glad to get rid of the boulder without payment, providing that the transport cost him nothing and did not interfere with agricultural operations. In so far as this transport is concerned I suggested to Mr Hood that as my contribution to the memorial I would undertake the transporting of the sarsen (providing that chosen was in a suitable position and no too far away from the nearest road) from its original situation to the nearest point whence it could be transported by road to its ultimate destination, such transport of course being arranged by the memorial committee.

Since moving the large megaliths which have formed part of the monument above referred to comes under our work annually, we have had not inconsiderable experience therein, an experience perhaps second only to that enjoyed by the original builders of the monument at the close of the Neolithic Age, and it may not be without interest to mention that the methods that we employ are substantially the same as those utilised some 3,800 years ago. We have consequently, the equipment and tackle necessary for the purpose, and it would not be to us – from a professional point of view – by any manner of means uninteresting to experiment with the transport of one of these sarsens from its natural position for a certain distance, since we desire to obtain data concerning such matters as how many men it would take to transport a stone of a given weight over various types of ground and so on.

May I suggest, therefore, that you should visit us here on some day suitable to yourself – staying a night with me if you will consent to do so – and we could drive round in my caterpillar tractor (which I have used for the last 14 years for cross country work) examining any sites which I think might possibly suit your purpose, and one which I particularly have in mind as being in all probability the most satisfactory. Having selected your sarsen and negotiated with the landowner concerned you could then arrange to take any photographs of the stone in situ that you desire, after

which we can at the first available suitable opportunity begin the work of transportation. This accomplished, we would place the stone at a given point in the vicinity to a road where it would remain until you called for it with your transport.

It may be of interest to yourself or certain members of the Committee to know that my colleague and Chief Assistant is Mr Stuart Piggott, F.S.A., whose parents live at Petersfield and who is naturally conversant with the suggested memorial, and I believe acquainted with several members of the Committee.

Yours truly,
Alex Keiller

(Incidentally, Alexander Keiller was born in 1889. When Keiller was nine, his father died, leaving him the sole heir to the great marmalade fortune.)

Transporting and Positioning the Stone.

The obvious place for the memorial stone was Steep, two miles north of Petersfield in Hampshire, because this village was for many years his last home, in the true sense of the word, before he was killed at the 1st Battle of Arras in 1917. It was the one home he thought of and loved most, not only because of its beautiful setting but also because his financial circumstances were somewhat easier then, bringing him the little peace of mind he ever had.

Lord Horder owned the whole of the hillside, with its deep Beech Hangers, a miracle in autumn colours, and when asked if the stone might be set up on the Shoulder of Mutton (locally called "The Mutton"), not only consented but generously provided that this tract of country to the north of his house, Ashford Chase, would be dedicated, in perpetuity, to the memory of Edward Thomas and would not be built upon.

The large sarsen stone, weighing about four tons, lying half buried in a field at Kennett, Wiltshire, was chosen to be the memorial. The necessary monies being procured, the stone was secured.

Alex Keiller and the stone half buried in the ground at Kennett, Wiltshire.

The work of moving the stone was entrusted to the firm of Blackford and Son of Calne, Wiltshire. The work began by digging all round it so that chains could be inserted to drag the stone to a hard road where it could be loaded onto a lorry. This was done by the firm's 12 ton lorry. When at the roadside a gantry was erected and the stone lifted on to a lorry by means of a five ton chain pulley block. The stone was then taken to Calne for the night where all necessary equipment for the completion of the contract was loaded onto the lorry.

'Waiting movement to the Shoulder of Mutton'

A start was made early next day, and by forenoon, the stone was on top of the Shoulder of Mutton Hill and within about half a mile of its final position. The lorry had now done its work, the gantry was re-erected and the stone lifted from the lorry on to a low trolley, generally called a 'bogey'. This was then pulled along a narrow track by means of pulley blocks and rope secured to trees at the roadside. Now came the most difficult part. The stone had to pass through a wood which was covered with thick undergrowth. Shrubs had to be cut down and the ground surface levelled to allow the free passage of the bogey which could only proceed slowly with the aid of planks under its wheels and hauled by pulley blocks and ropes attached to trees. Once through the wood, the bogey had to be held back from running down hill, a gradient of one in four by means of a long rope attached at one end of the bogey, and the other fixed to a pulley block attached to a tree gradually being held back by man power and eventually it arrived near its final position.

A hole was then dug where the stone was to be situated, the gantry erected over the site and the hole partly filled with concrete and by means of the gantry and tackle, the stone was carried off the bogey and lowered into the concrete while it was still wet. When the concrete had set, the gantry was pulled down, concrete was banked round the stone up to about six inches below ground level then turf was placed all around the stone so that no concrete could be seen.

Fixing the Plaque

The bronze tablet, which was designed by Professor Patrick Abercrombie bearing the inscription, had to be let in flush with the surface of the stone.

Although this only meant cutting to a depth of a quarter of an inch over an area of one square foot of the stone, it took the stonemason two and a half working days and the mason had to use three dozen new chisels to complete the recess.

The work was carried without any damage being done to the stone or accident of any kind by the following employees of the firm: W. Kent Foreman, G. Gerrish Mason, who cut the stone for the tablet, R. Sanders, lorry driver, B. Oliver, lorry driver's mate, E. Hiskins, labourer, Mr Gerald Unsworth, supervisor of the work.

The method to determine what inscription would be engraved upon the plaque was determined in the following way. All of the committee members were asked to submit any passage from one of Edward Thomas books or poems, and a ballot was held. The quotation chosen was submitted by Rowland L. Watson.

The Unveiling Ceremony

The ceremony, which was entirely informal, took place at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday 2nd October 1937. The poet laureate, John Masefield, gave an address and then Lord Horder unveiled the Memorial Stone.

Edward's poems Lights Out, Words, The Word, Beauty, Out in the Dark, Sedge Warblers, Some Eyes Condemn and If I should Ever, were read by Masefield. Fate sometimes conspires to be unkind on such occasions, and Rowland Watson who had worked so tirelessly to bring the Edward Thomas Memorial to a final conclusion, suffered a bitter disappointment, when on the day of the unveiling he was confined to bed with influenza and was therefore unable to attend the occasion.

Lord Horder moreover expressed the wish that the only expense in connexion with the memorial to be met by the Fund should be the cost of the memorial stone and of the tablet. At the time of the unveiling, the Fund amounted to £215; the cost of the stone and of the tablet, together with a few incidental expenses, were approximately £65; and the committee decided to devote whatever balance remained to the Petersfield Hospital. A cot in the children's ward was named after Edward Thomas, and an appropriate plaque was placed above it.

The Plaque on Berryfield Cottage
Lord Horder had also kindly given the committee permission to place a tablet on Berryfield Cottage, at the foot of the hill, where Edward Thomas had lived for some three years. Again this tablet was designed by Professor Patrick Abercrombie. At the conclusion of the ceremony the tablet on Berryfield Cottage, at the foot of the hill, was unveiled by Henry W. Nevinson, and trumpeters of the Royal Garrison Artillery sounded the reveille from the hillside.

A letter from Henry W. Nevinson to Rowland Watson gives a personal insight to the event.

4, Downside Crescent
Hampstead, N.W.3
3rd October 1937

Dear Mr Watson,

This is just to say that, thanks to your industry and arrangement, everything went off very well yesterday. The trumpeters blew too soon, and I forgot to pull the string for the unveiling. All else was admirable. I was solemnly warned not to attempt the hill, but could have managed it. There was quite a good assembly, Masefield, de la Mare, the Bishop, the Horders, and many other Intellectuals, besides a lot of local villagers, men and girls. Helen Thomas was delightful as usual, and refused to be overwhelmed with memories. The son and one daughter were present. The Horders were most courteous and hospitable. I spoke briefly of Thomas as I had known him.

The day was very beautiful, slight autumn mist and sun. Like everyone else we owe you thanks.

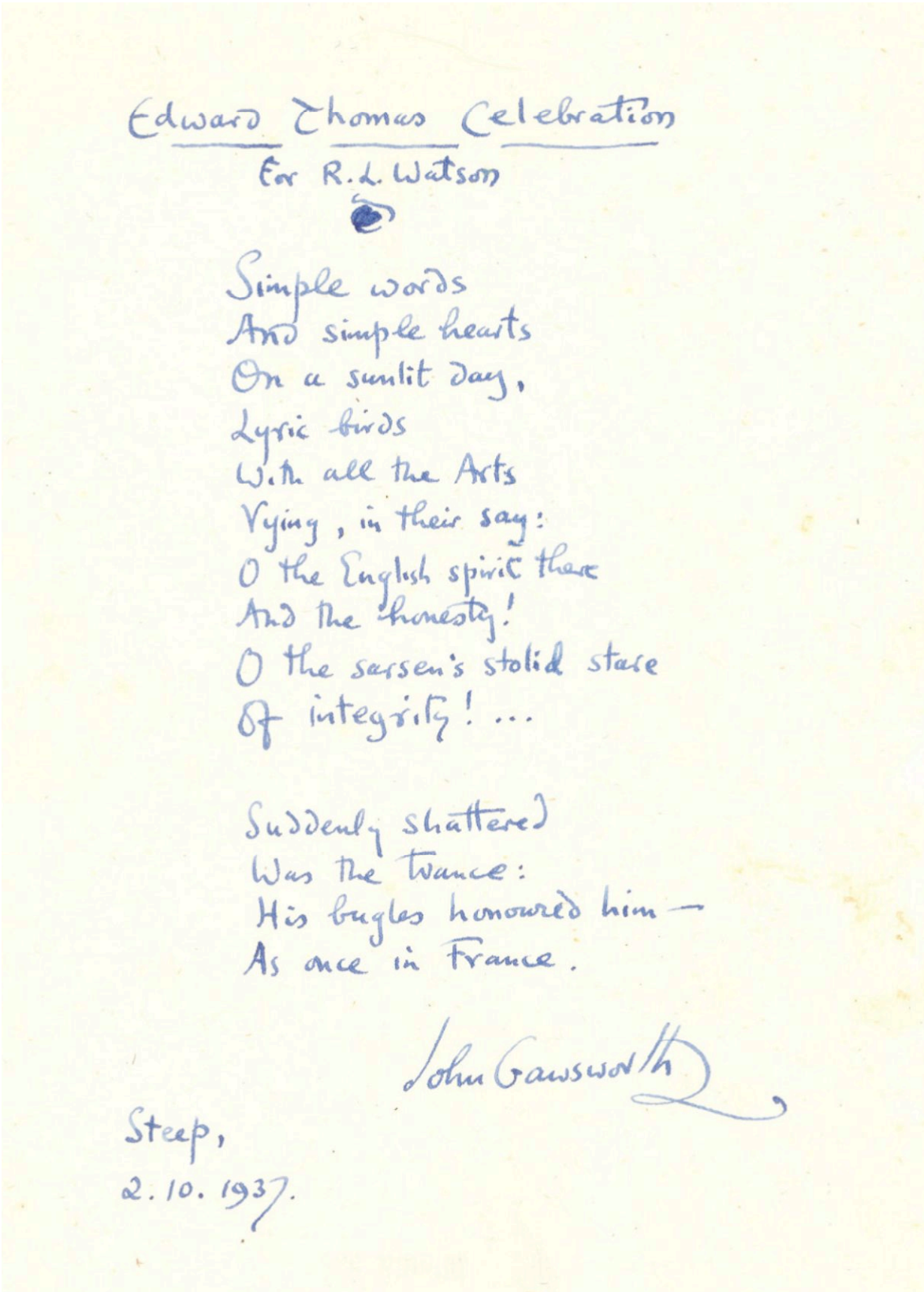
Yours most truly,
Henry W. Nevinson

Cot at Petersfield Hospital
After the ceremony the party proceeded to Petersfield Hospital where the Right Reverend, the Lord Bishop of Chichester dedicated the Cot in the Children's Ward. Helen Thomas unveiled the tablet above the Cot.

Newspaper Reports
The occasion was extensively reported in the Hampshire Telegraph dated 8th October 1937, with further reports in the Western Mail and South Wales News dated 4th October 1937.

Conclusions
It is a fact that the most successful of projects are achieved by the efforts of one person; in this case it was Roland Watson. Without his enthusiasm and drive the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton would in all probability never have been completed. The committee showed their appreciation of his commitment in a letter signed by everyone.

The poem 'Edward Thomas Celebration' was written for the occasion by the poet John Gawsworth and was dedicated to Rowland L. Watson.



Edward Thomas Celebration

For R. L. Watson

Simple words
And simple hearts
On a sunlit day,
Lyric birds
With all the Arts
Vying, in their say:
O the English spirit there
And the honesty!
O the sarsen's stolid stare
Of integrity! ...

Suddenly shattered
Was the trance:
His bugles honoured him —
As once in France.

John Galsworthy

Steep,
2. 10. 1937.

Edward Thomas said in a letter to Dad Uzzell, "if they put a list of my books on my tombstone I shall want one as big as one of the stones at Stonehenge". The committee did not get him one of the stones from Stonehenge; what they did procure for him was a sarsen stone just as ancient, and a hillside dedicated to his memory.

Rowland Watson with Helen Thomas outside Bridge Cottage circa 1960.

The author is grateful for the assistance of Mrs Jane Kirby, the librarian at Bedales School, Steep and Rowland Watson's granddaughter Mrs Christina Dilley.

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The Isle of Wight and Edward Thomas's consideration of himself as a writer

By John Monks

This is the centenary year of one of Edward Thomas's less celebrated topographical books, *The Isle of Wight*. Blackie and Son commissioned it immediately after he had completed another guidebook, *Windsor Castle*, for their Beautiful England series. It is a slight work—although not as skimped in the writing as *Windsor Castle* had been—but it has an important place in the context of Thomas's writing about writing.

Most noteworthy in *The Isle of Wight* is a debate that is a reference point for the development of Thomas's ideas about the imaginative impact nature and landscape have on a writer. He describes how "two or three of us", under the spell of unspoilt Hampshire countryside, "sat down and became silent, our social partnership dissolved into a number of oblivious individuals." This is a very Thomasy device to introduce a three-way conversation that he proceeds to hold with himself. All the characters are "Others" and express different thoughts that arise in Thomas because of the landscape he is viewing:

> If we let our eyes wander a little farther to the right than the farmhouse they could not avoid meeting the sky, and against the sky, on a tract of hot waste land, was a solitary yew. This tree was ruinous in outline, tortured and bleak.

There follows a debate about imagination and literature—about writing. Although Thomas divides the contributions among the different speakers using inverted commas, they are written in one voice and represent a continuous rumination that the ruinous tree arouses about the power of landscape to become imaginatively changed into "the legitimate setting of some poem or romance."

In fact, the speakers recount different ways that the romantic and literary suggestiveness of landscape had worked on Thomas's imagination since childhood. The first speaker quotes Ruskin on the interrelation of romance and place. He recalls an island in a pond where he used to believe Robinson Crusoe first saw the sandy footprint of the cannibals. The words conjure up the adventurous boyhood haunts, the ponds on Wandsworth Common, that Thomas describes in his autobiography, *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*. The next speaker describes a white inn whose isolated setting is a fit haunt for various types of imaginative fancy, including "highway robbery, with blunderbusses, masks, pretty ladies, and foaming horses." To this, the third speaker responds: "I don't know why you should want to fit a story to a scene like that. I am quite willing to wait until the tragedy or comedy arrives ... You people have such loose fancies, and you make the world a jumble of books, and men, and Nature, like a pantomime." Thomas describes the same inn—though significantly without brigandry—in a prose sketch written three years later in November 1914, entitled "The White Horse". It is an important document because he transformed the prose into "Up in the Wind", the poem that began his career as a poet. The poem dismisses the fancifulness of highway robbery, blunderbusses and the like, in a line:

> While I drank
> I might have mused of coaches and highwaymen

The speaker in *The Isle of Wight*, however, goes on to attach romantic associations to a line of cypresses, much in the manner of Thomas's *Horae Solitariae* essays; then the first speaker reminds the others of features that can provoke the imagination when encountered in the countryside, such as the ashes of a wayfarer's fire, a hilltop castle or church, a group

of trees resembling a ruin, a crossroads with a signpost, and an empty cottage in the woods—all to be recognised in Thomas's imaginative and poetic writing.

The discussion as a whole, in its examination of the relation of art to life, of landscape to literature, anticipates the argument of the poem "The Chalk-Pit". In this, there are also unidentified speakers who debate their responses to the countryside—

> ... what was once a chalk-pit: now it is
> By accident an amphitheatre.

The first speaks in the manner of an *Isle of Wight* protagonist, as well as in the tones of the Thomas of the early essays, aware of the sudden departure of something surprised and frightened away:

> its emptiness and silence
> And stillness haunt me, as if just before
> It was not empty, silent, still, but full
> Of life
> ...
> Some ghost has left it now as we two came.

The second speaker prefers to stick to the facts, to the scene as it is:

> It is called the Dell.
> They have not dug chalk here for a century.

Edna Longley gave the speakers characters, as follows: "The first speaker (*A*) responds in a coarsened way to the scene, the embryonic materials of poetry. He imposes upon it from outside a 'fanciful' interpretation. *A* is the self-conscious artist deploying a vocabulary of art ... He represents the side of himself that Thomas progressively learned to curb in his prose books ... The second speaker (*B*) is the truer Thomas who submits his imagination to the actualities of a situation" (*Edward Thomas: Poems and Last Poems*, 1973). More recently she has suggested that the dialectics of A and B are more complex and that "perhaps A voices the extent to which Thomas's poetry remains 'haunted' by Romantic possibilities" (*The Annotated Collected Poems*, 2008). Certainly such possibilities remained open to Thomas. "November", composed the day after "Up in the Wind", expresses the fundamental dichotomy of "The Chalk-Pit":

> Up from the dirty earth men stare:
> One imagines a refuge there
> Above the mud, in the pure bright
> Of the cloudless heavenly light:
> Another loves earth and November more dearly
> Because without them, he sees clearly,
> The sky would be nothing more to his eye
> Than he, in any case, is to the sky

Although the debate in *The Isle of Wight* appears crudely wrought beside "The Chalk-Pit" and its artistic perspectives contrast less sharply than the poem's two voices, both writings reflect a long-standing dilemma for Thomas over "fancies" and "the truth or nothing" that goes back at least as far as *Oxford*. Here he identified Pantheism and other fanciful snares that entice the "indolent walker, who is content to sit under a hedge and wait for the best things, to make his gods." The discussion in *The Isle of Wight* is not conclusive. In

"The Chalk-Pit" Thomas dismisses his fanciful side with, "You please yourself. I should prefer the truth / Or nothing." Yet ironically, the same speaker B ends the poem with a "mystery" of his own, one that acknowledges a physical, as opposed to an imaginative, relationship with nature.

Irony too closes the debate in *The Isle of Wight*, with the more sceptical of the voices speaking dismissively: "Let the hungry storyteller make more of that scene. I shan't; I have no imagination." Thomas reappears as the first-person author of the guidebook, remarking that he likes "to please mind and eye together with looking at the houses I shall never enter." An account follows of a mysterious intuition at a farmhouse among pines involving a young man "newly returned from his last term at a University" who wants to be an artist in London, and death. Thomas's apprehension is so strong that he writes, "I had a superstitious feeling that I had truly divined a tragedy which had been enacted there." It is tempting to go with R. George Thomas and recognise this as eagerness "to explore the numinous aspects of experience" (*Edward Thomas: A Portrait*, 1985). However, the debate on the impact of landscape on the imagination that has just preceded it, casts a more literary light on it. Why fit a story to a scene like that? Wait until tragedy happens if it is going to, one of the speakers had said. This seems to be nearer Thomas's view. For in the literary mode that will become that of B in "The Chalk-Pit"—"But I will ask"—he lends circumstantial authenticity to his narrative by adding: "At the inn, half a mile away, I enquired about the farmhouse and its inhabitants, but was disappointed. I cannot explain it. Perhaps it was a prophecy." Perhaps, also, consciousness that he was writing a guidebook mitigated his attention to the numinous.

At this stage of his writing, in 1911, Thomas was moving closer to the manner of expression that he sought all along. The temptations of the self-conscious literary artist were being shed for "the truth or nothing". The passages in *The Isle of Wight* show the over-imaginative voice still strong, but they also show Thomas's insistent consideration of himself as a writer winning through.

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from Guy Cuthbertson:
The Isle of Wight will be included in *England and Wales*, the second volume of *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition*, edited by Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (Oxford University Press, October 2011). 650 pp. approx. £85. A review of the first volume of the prose, *Autobiographies*, will appear in the next newsletter.

Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition, and the first volume in particular, was launched on 11 June 2011 at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, in the Old Dining Hall, next to one of Thomas's favourite spots, the churchyard of St Peter in the East ('an old resort to which I went alone, and enjoyed the almost vernal and floral beauty of the dainty golden lime leaves overhanging the tombs and full of sunlight'). I would like to thank everyone who attended.

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I used to envy the bell-ringers on days of ancient festival or recent victory, and cannot wonder that old Anthony à Wood should have noted the eight bells of Merton as he came home from antiquarian walks, and would often ring those same bells 'for recreation's sake.' When their sound is dead it is sweet to enter that peacefullest and homeliest of churchyards, St Peter's in the East, overlooked by St Edmund Hall and Queen's College and the old city wall. There is a peace which only the thrush and blackbird break, and even their singing is at length merely the most easily distinguishable part of the great melody of the place. Most of the graves are so old or so forgotten that it is easy – and in Spring it is difficult not – to perceive a kind of dim reviving life among the stones, where, as in some old, quiet books, the names live again a purged and untroubled existence.
- *Oxford* (1903)

Reviews

A Hundred Doors **by Michael Longley** (Cape Poetry) £10.00 ISBN 9780224091381

It is one of life's great pleasures to find a book of good verse; however, life occasionally conspires to place a great book of verse into your hands. *A Hundred Doors* by Michael Longley is just such a book.

Carrigskeewaun in County Mayo has for many years featured in Longley's poetry, and it is also prevalent in the poems contained herein. The poems take us on a journey of exploration, where we like his children and grandchildren are introduced with much love to the landscape and the natural flora and fauna. There are poems about friends, and one cannot but help notice the similarities in Edward Thomas's verse. Longley writes with a sweet loving beauty about his children, grandchildren, his wife Edna and friends. One friend in particular is central to 'The Lifeboat' where Longley imagines that he meets his death in his favourite pub, but it is his old friend Charlie Gaffney the landlord who has died and Longley is left contemplating the loss. 'Shall I let the dog out? Would the fire take another sod?'

There are references to Edward Thomas in the poems 'A Gust' and 'Footnote'. We meet Longley's father, and learn of his citation in receiving the Military Cross in the First World War. The title poem 'A Hundred Doors' reflects upon a visit to an ancient church on the Greek Island of Paros with its xenophobic Sacristan.

The poems take us on a journey through trees, with birds, flowers, foxes and landscape, but, as with all the best journeys, with friends. These poems should be read aloud, read them to your wife, your husband, your partner, your grandchildren, your friends, but read them you will not be disappointed.

Colin G. Thornton

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Severn & Somme: The Life of Ivor Gurney, First World War Poet and Composer, 1890–1937.
A film by Diana Taylor and Anthea Page

DVD Redcliffe Film Productions. Duration 52 minutes. With Tony Billington, Judith Reiser, Martin Reiser, Chris Worthington and Kate Sherlock. Narrator: Charles Thompson. Poetry read by Malcolm Grieve.

Redcliffe Films is a new organisation that aims to make feature and documentary films on a low budget, using technicians in the field who no longer work in the industry but wish to have a creative input in the film world. Their first major film is a docu-drama about the First World War Poet and Composer, Ivor Gurney. The film, shot on location in Bristol and Gloucestershire utilising local actors was made on a budget of £300. Ivor Gurney is portrayed in this sensitive telling of his tragic story using both his poetry and music. It is a well-balanced film telling the story of his life, which at the end brings you much closer to the man. The images work well with the poetry, and the section relating to both Helen and Edward Thomas will be of particular interest to Fellowship members.

It is planned to premier *Severn and Somme* at the Arnolfini Media Centre in Bristol in December following a live performance of Gurney's orchestral pieces.

The DVD costs £10.00 plus £2.00 postage and packing. Cheques should be made payable to Redcliffe Film Productions for £12.00 please. Further details can be obtained from Redcliffefilms@hotmail.co.uk Or Redcliffe Film Productions, 1 Mill Avenue, Bristol BS1 4AJ

Colin G. Thornton

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from The Keats Foundation

Keats House Hampstead was the home of John Keats from December 1818 until he left for Rome in August 1820. Here Keats composed his mysterious and magical lyric *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, finished his wonderful narrative poem *The Eve of St Agnes*, and wrote his great odes of spring 1819 including *Ode to a Nightingale*. It was here, too, that Fanny Brawne lived with her mother, sister and brother.

Built in 1815, nearly two hundred years ago, Keats House has always welcomed poets. Here Keats was visited by his poet-friends John Hamilton Reynolds, Leigh Hunt, and Barry Cornwall. The painters Joseph Severn and William Hilton came too.

The Keats Foundation exists to encourage enjoyment and understanding of Keats's poems, letters, life and times and to inspire new generations of young poets to fulfil their creative ambitions. We support three exciting initiatives based at Keats House – the Keats House Young Poets' Forum, the Keats House Schools Programme, and the Keats House Public Lecture Programme – all of which you can find described on our web site.

Please join the Keats Foundation community by becoming one of our Friends, and enjoy all of the stimulating activities at Keats House Hampstead, including the annual Keats Festival of poetry and the arts. There are three levels of support – 'Stedfast', 'Bright Star', and 'Ever Truly Yours'.

The best way to reach us is by email at keatsfoundation@cityoflondon.gov.uk
You can telephone Keats House on 020 7332 3868
www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/keatshousehampstead

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Helen Thomas remembered that, when they were teenagers in London, she and Edward 'would walk to Hampstead and look at Keats's house'. Later, he wrote his book on Keats and a chapter on Keats in *A Literary Pilgrim in England*. Keats's influence can be seen in Thomas's poems, such as 'Liberty' and 'There's Nothing Like the Sun'.

'Hampstead Heath in August' is the subject of one of Thomas's 'London Miniatures', and during the war Thomas ran map-reading exercises on Hampstead Heath: 'I help to look over men's work & take a squad of 20 or so out on Hampstead Heath to take bearings & sketch a map on the spot etc.'.

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Other News

***The Spectator*'s Competition**:

> In Competition No. 2701 you were invited to take the opening line of 'Adlestrop', substitute a location of your choice, and continue for up to a further 15 lines. The result of a brief, unscheduled stop at a Cotswold station just before the first world war, 'Adlestrop' has spawned many imitators. Jimmie Pearse's fine parody, 'Willesden Gree', prompted me to set the comp — 'We sat in silence, face to face/ (For that is what the British do),/ While over all the air, apace,/ Stole twilight scents of North-West Two.') — and for especially devoted fans there is an entire anthology, *Adlestrop Revisited* edited by Anne Harvey, 'inspired by Edward Thomas's poem'. Not surprisingly, then, it was a popular assignment. (25 June)

The winning poems begin as follows: Yes, I remember Odelstrap … Yes, I remember Melbury Osmond … Yes, I remember Elsinore … Yes, I remember Tunbridge Wells … Yes, I remember Steeple Bumpleigh

In *The Guardian* on 17 June 2011, Jonathan Bate began his review of *To the River* by Olivia Laing by talking about Edward Thomas.

> "A great many must be walking over England nowadays for the primary object of writing books," wrote Edward Thomas, who spent the years immediately before the first world war doing just that. "It has not been decided whether this is a worthy object," he added with characteristic wryness. From the 1920s onwards, metropolitan taste-makers were in general agreement that of all literary genres, the English Journey was among the least worthy of serious consideration. It belonged with the occasional essay and the countryman's nature notes as an epitome of all that was middlebrow, provincial and reactionary.
>
> Edward Thomas made the remark early in *The Icknield Way*, a classic example of the genre, structured around a 10-day walk across middle England, with diversions into the highways and byways of literary anecdote, folklore, natural history and the passing conversation of stout, red-faced salt-of-the-earth types. In the second half of the 20th century, volumes of this kind languished by the barrow-load outside the second-hand bookshops on Charing Cross Road.

From Ian Friend:
I thought you might like to know that in sub tropical Brisbane I am making a series of paintings relating particularly to Edward Thomas's poem *But these things also*. It's actually not as strange as it sounds as I was born and raised in the 1950's and 60's in Sussex at Eastbourne and have developed a strong fascination with the memory of being nurtured in the context of the South Downs. Thomas's poetry has significant resonance in my investigation of these memories/imaginings of the chalk downs landscape. H J Massingham has also been an important reference in this project. You can view earlier works at www.artbunker.com.au.
ArtBunker
PO Box 8077
WOOLLOONGABBA QLD 4102

The Journal of the Arthur Ransome Society, "Mixed Moss" 2010 edition contains an article entitled "His pleasant company" by retired schoolteacher John Earl . He discusses the friendship between ET and Arthur Ransome which 'got off to a flying start' but eventually sadly cooled because of the adverse attitudes of each towards the other's wife. It includes interesting quotations from the letters of each.

Copies of the CD 'Fast Beat My Heart' are still available at £10.00 including postage from Richard Emeny, Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 6NQ, The CD, subtitled 'Edward Thomas and Family at Steep' is an anthology compiled by Chris Brown, read by Alastair Danson and Harriet Granby, and with Myfanwy Thomas's voice. Apart from poems and prose by Edward, there are extracts from Helen Thomas's 'World Without End', and from letters, while Myfanwy reads from her book,'One of These Fine Days.' - fifty-one items in all. It makes an excellent present as well as being a pleasure to keep.

The Stranger's Child, the new novel by Alan Hollinghurst, begins in 1913 and focuses on a Brooke-like Georgian poet.

Twitter-users are frequently circulating quotations from Edward Thomas. For instance, one line that has been 'retweeted' a lot recently is 'The past is the only thing that smells sweet'. Some information about Edward Thomas can also be found on Twitter at guywjc.

Back Issues: A new service has been launched for members of the Fellowship that will also benefit all researchers and lovers of Edward Thomas's work. The indexes of main articles in the back numbers of the Newsletter can now be viewed on the Fellowship's website, and copies of articles from back numbers will be available to order.

Since the first issue in 1980 the Newsletter has become a storehouse of archive and critical material on Edward Thomas, much of it unpublished elsewhere. The aim is to develop the Newsletter's potential as a resource for both pleasure and academic research.

The address of the Fellowship website is www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk. Copies of articles from the indexes will cost £3 each to cover copying and postage. They can be obtained from John Monks, 141 Stanley Park Road, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 3JJ; telephone 0208 770 0230; email jbmonks@btinternet.com. Cheques should be payable to The Edward Thomas Fellowship. Whole issues can also be provided.

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Now All Roads Lead to France

Edward Thomas was perhaps the most beguiling and influential of First World War poets. *Now All Roads Lead to France* by Matthew Hollis is an account of his final five years, centred on his extraordinary friendship with Robert Frost and Thomas's fatal decision to fight in the war.

Members of The Edward Thomas Fellowship can enjoy 20% off this title plus free P&P by ordering from the Faber website **www.faber.co.uk**. To use this offer you will need to sign-up on the site and enter promotional code: **etfellowship** in the designated space when you confirm your order. Offer ends 29/02/2012.

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The Edward Thomas Fellowship
Chairman: Richard Emeny Hon. Secretary: Colin Thornton
Hon Treasurer and Membership Secretary: Larry Skillman, Eastbrook, Morleys Road, Weald, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN14 6QX (Telephone 01732 740259). The subscription is £10 per annum (£9 if paid by Banker's Order) for single membership, or £15 for two adults at the same address (£14 if paid by Banker's Order).
Newsletter Editor: Guy Cuthbertson etfjournal@gmail.com Please send material for the next Newsletter as a Word document in an email attachment (if possible). Thank you.

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Back cover: The Royal Artillery Memorial, Hyde Park Corner.