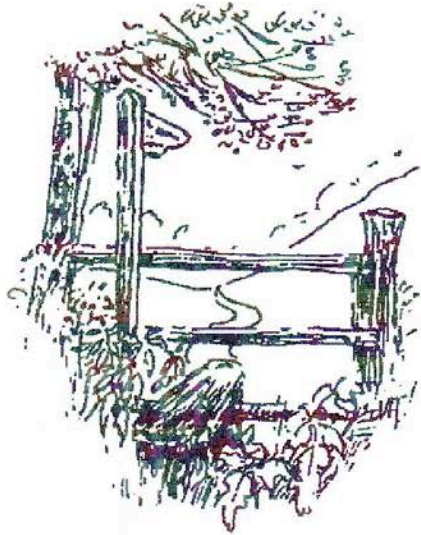


THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 67

January 2012

The landlady was said to be a Gypsy and was followed wherever she went by a white-footed black cat that looked as if it was really a lady from a far country enchanted into a cat. The Gypsy was a most Christian body. She used to treat with unmistakeable kindness, whenever he called at the inn, a gentleman who was notoriously an atheist and teetotaler. When asked upbraidingly why, she said: 'He seems a nice gentleman, and as he is going to a place where there won't be many comforts, I think we ought to do our best to make this world as happy as possible for him.'

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Newsletters on the Website: the University of Gloucestershire is digitising back numbers of the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter so that the entire archive will be available on the Fellowship's website. 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>

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.

Minutes and Agenda: we are including the minutes and agenda because we need to get feedback from members - especially any thoughts or suggestions that members would have for the centenary of Edward Thomas's death in 2017. The centenary of his birth resulted in the Steep Windows and the formation of the Fellowship and we want to commemorate the centenary of his death in a similar way with input from members. Please send feedback to Colin Thornton.

Accounts: the audited accounts for 2011 will appear in the next edition of the newsletter.

The Birthday Walk, Sunday 4th March 2012

The Walk: the Birthday Walk is the main annual gathering for Fellowship members. Following the day of walking, tea will be served and the annual general meeting of the Fellowship will take place. The day will end with a Birthday Tribute of readings selected from the works of Edward Thomas and associated writers.

There will be two walks this year, forming a figure of eight route around Steep. Those who wish to do so may therefore join either or both walks.

Meet in the car park at Bedales School Steep (parking and toilets will be available) between 10:00 and 10:30. Walk sheets will be available on the day.

The morning walk of about 4½ miles will start at 10:30 sharp and will include a visit to the memorial stone.

The afternoon walk will start at 14:30 from Bedales and will be a more gentle 2½ miles.

We shall end our day at Steep Church around 16:00, where tea will be available at a modest cost. This will be followed by the Fellowship's AGM and the Birthday Tribute.

If you need any further information about the walk, please contact Stephen Turner, 4 Eversley Drive, Elvetham Heath, Fleet, Hampshire, GU51 1BG or telephone 01252 810852 or use the e-mail address below.

The walk sheet will be available towards the end of February and anyone who would like one in advance should e-mail: stephenjturner1@aol.com .

Refreshments: For full details about Lunch, please see the booking form.

Pre-Walk Supper 2012: we will be having supper at the Jolly Drover, Liss, near Petersfield on the evening of 3rd March 2012. If anyone would like to be there, would they please contact Colin Thornton so that he can make the necessary booking.

E-mail colingthornton@btopenworld.com Tel: 01983 853366

Colin G. Thornton, 1, Carfax, Undercliff Drive, St. Lawrence, Isle of Wight, PO38 1XG

Study Day

Poetry, ideas, and music are the irresistible ingredients of this year's Edward Thomas Fellowship Study Day that takes as its theme 'Edward Thomas: Adlestrop and Beyond'. This year we return to Thomas's poetry to examine the quality of his writing and the responses Thomas evokes, with a top-notch line-up of contributors. The Study Day will take place on Saturday, 30 June 2012, at the Oxford Quaker Meeting House, St Giles, Oxford.

Professor Patrick McGuinness, poet, academic and Booker long-listed novelist, will speak in the morning. Patrick McGuinness's attachment to Thomas is long-established. He has written that Thomas's poems extend the present moment both backwards and forwards in time. Like Thomas, he has a close engagement with Wales, where he lives. He is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at St Anne's College, Oxford, author of academic studies and three collections of poetry, and his first novel, *The Last Hundred Days*, was long-listed for the 2011 Booker Prize.

Following lunch, baritone **Philip Lancaster** will present and perform a recital entitled "'Piercing Solitude and Silence": Song settings by Edward Thomas', that demonstrates how a range of composers have responded to Thomas in settings of his poems. Philip Lancaster specializes in early 20th century music and poetry and is increasingly acclaimed and in demand as a singer. He is co-editing Ivor Gurney's complete poetry for Oxford University Press, and has scored for orchestra Gurney's only choral setting of Edward Thomas, *The Trumpet*.

Pianist **Helen Jones** will accompany him. She performed her first piano concerto as a schoolgirl and continued her musical training while reading history at Cambridge, and while studying for her PhD at King's College, London, working as a piano teacher and accompanist. She now combines a career in university administration with her musical appearances.

Award-winning writer **Robert Macfarlane** is the afternoon speaker and will present his personal reflection, "'Beyond My Thinking": Thomas as Philosopher'. His new book, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*, will just have been published by Penguin. Robert Macfarlane follows in the footsteps of Edward Thomas as a walker-writer, lover of paths, and celebrant of the relationship between landscape and the imagination. Thomas features strongly in his new book. Robert Macfarlane, a Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and senior lecturer in English, has also written an introduction to Thomas's *The South Country*. His earlier books, *Mountains of the Mind* and *The Wild Places* received numerous awards.

The Study Day will provide plenty of opportunity for questions and discussion from the audience. There will be a bookstall where works by the speakers and other books can be bought. Registration is from 10.30 am for an 11 am start, and the day will close at around 4 pm. The costs of the Study Day, like everything else, have risen sharply but thanks to the generosity of our contributors we can minimise the impact. The fee, including lunch and refreshments, will be £22. A booking form is enclosed with this Newsletter. It promises to be one of our most fascinating study days, so please book early.

Visit to the Edward Thomas Collection at Cardiff University
2pm, Wednesday 16 May 2012

The Edward Thomas Collection at Cardiff is the largest such collection in the British Isles. It was established by Professor R. George Thomas with the co-operation of the Thomas family. It consists of manuscripts of poems and of *Beautiful Wales*, some 3000 letters, albums of reviews, photographs, about 100 volumes belonging to Thomas annotated by him, three portraits, musical settings of poems, tape recordings of Thomas family members, more tangible relics such as furniture made by Edward Thomas and the watch he was wearing when he was killed and much more besides.

On the visit we will be able to see a selection of these items and have a tour of the Special Collections and Archives facility at the university. We will also hear details about online cataloguing of the whole archive and be able to use the 3D digitised rare books touch screen similar to that at the British Library. In addition, we will be able to see the Special Collections' latest exhibition of music manuscripts from the 14th to the 20th century. This is an excellent opportunity to view source material of great interest.

Although Cardiff's Edward Thomas Collection is always open to researchers and scholars, the visit will mark the first time that it has been opened specifically for the Fellowship. It will be an afternoon visit commencing at 2.00 p.m. at the Special Collections building and because of constraints of space there is a limit of thirty members on a first come first served basis. Depending on where people will be travelling from, it may be possible to hire a minibus so that people can travel together inexpensively. If you would like to take part in the visit, please contact Richard Emeny at Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 6NQ, telephone: 01278 662856, email: remeny@halswell.fsnet.co.uk by the weekend of the Birthday Walk, 3rd/4th March 2012. Full details and a map showing the location of the Special Collections will be provided nearer the time.

Awareness-raising walk for the Dymock Poets Paths
(from the Friends of the Dymock Poets)
2pm, Sunday 27 May 2012

Meeting at Brooms Green Village Hall Car Park, Gloucestershire

This will be a gentle amble to explore the Dymock Poets' countryside, including parts of Poets' Paths I and II, Brooms Green and Ryton. We'll pass the former Old Horseshoe Inn, watering hole for the poets, the Garland Hut, and The Gallows (home to the Abercrombies and the Frosts). Maps will be provided. We will introduce relevant selections of poetry, ecology and local history. This walk is to encourage awareness of the cultural significance of this area. Contact Barbara Davis for further information on 01531 890416, or Anna Stenning by email anna.stenning@gmail.com

Tim Wilton-Steer
(31st March 1944 - 18th June 2011)

Tim Wilton-Steer was one of the best known of the Fellowship's members, attending almost every meeting and walk, as well as occasionally speaking. Having taken an honours degree in modern languages at St Andrews, all his career was spent amongst books. In 1968 he joined Pan Books Ltd, where he worked as both export and home sales manager, before moving to Sphere Books in 1975. In 1980 he joined the De Agostini Group, where he stayed until retirement in 2007. He held several posts in De Agostini from Managing Director of Publicator, an international rights agency to Director of the Book Division of Orbis Publishing Ltd, which specialised in the production of partworks, and Managing Director of De Agostini Rights. Retirement was something of an illusion, as Tim founded his own 'WS Consultancy', which apart from servicing publishing, meant that he was also wine consultant to Laithwaites.

Tim's mainly international work took him all over the globe. For instance, in one month of 1978 he visited Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, La Paz, Cuzco, Lima, Bogota, Quito, Acapulco, and New York. Such far flung visits gave him opportunities, often surprisingly successful, to search for Edward Thomas items. Who but Tim would have found a translation into Turkish of Edward Thomas poems in the Turkish Airlines internal journal! In fact, as he reported his discoveries, it became evident that Edward Thomas was a much more world respected writer than might be expected. He turned up in the most unlikely places. At home Tim had what must count as the most extensive private collection of Edward Thomas items in the world, though his interest was not simply as a collector, but as a lover of the whole corpus of the work.

A sociable man, always enthusiastic, it was not surprising that he was a member of the MCC and Queen's Club, at both of which he played Real Tennis and Rackets. He was a member of the Garrick Club, and would recount with glee his experiences with one or two of the more eccentric Fellowship members he entertained there, including one who arrived wearing shorts and with a large rucksack on his back, to the consternation of the flunkey on the door. It was the type of situation Tim relished.

His sudden and unexpected death came as a shock to his friends in the Fellowship, as it must have done to all his friends and contacts worldwide. He was modest about his considerable knowledge of Edward Thomas's work, sociable, generous, kind and fun. Our sadness is tempered by the memory of a thoroughly delightful man, and our thoughts are with Hilary, Charlotte, Alexander and Christopher and with his mother, Christine.

Richard Emeny

Edward Thomas
by Elizabeth Harris

(This is the first half of a chapter from Elizabeth Harris's PhD thesis. The second half will appear in the next newsletter.)

Nature and the English countryside were the central subjects of Edward Thomas' professional and personal life. His fascination with the natural world began in childhood and lasted until his early death in Agny in 1917. However, this relationship was not static or idyllic but intense, evolving and interrogative. His feelings towards the natural world were not ones of selfish possession or limited to a false ideal of an uninhabited retreat. Rather he was drawn to places where people lived and worked close to nature and his understanding of rural people and their hardships made him socially aware and compassionate to the marginalised and impoverished throughout his life.

He was writing at a time when Britain was undergoing tumultuous changes as it transformed into the most urbanised country in the world, with over three quarters of the population living in towns or cities and only seven per cent employed in agriculture¹. The collapse in farming and agricultural prices spurred many country workers to search for new employment and opportunities in the city. Here they often met with a different type of poverty in the form of slums, squalor, dangerous working conditions, pollution, and ill health. The social effects of this rural migration are evident throughout Thomas' poetry, behind 'the beauty of decay'². The changes to the countryside caused by the wider economic situation reveal themselves in his depiction of unchecked weeds and wildflowers, dilapidated out buildings, abandoned houses, and jobless labourers wandering the lanes. The realisation that the quiet behind many of the poems, which allows the speaker to hear the trees whispering and birds singing, is due to the depopulating consequences of war and economic migration, lends the poems another layer of meaning beyond the poetic or personal. Whilst other poets were drawn to the newly invigorated cities, Thomas kept his fidelity to smaller communities. His sense of the past started 'with people rather than with books'³. He hoped one day there would 'be a history of England written from the point of view of one parish'⁴ and his poems subtly begin this process of reading history and documenting changes from the perspective of the margins. The benefit of this alternative view of modernity is that when it is considered alongside urban poetry of the same era, a more comprehensive picture of Britain in the first few decades of the twentieth century emerges.

In ecocritical terms, Thomas' poetry and thinking pre-empts deep ecology's belief that nature has an intrinsic value, independent of human needs or cultural discourse. Nature is not a backdrop to his poems nor does it exist only as a series of signs in the cultural realm. Thomas' commitment to the environment is real and lived. Both his knowledge and his concern for it go beyond the purely literary. He made sacrifices so that he could live in the countryside, experiencing the reality of rural living first hand with people who depended on the land for a living. However, he has a more inclusive view of rural areas than many deep ecologists and approaches the interrelationship of culture and nature from a position of seeing more harmony than conflict between the two. His compassion for the vulnerable and

¹ Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The remaking of British society* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.24.

² Thompson, p. 26.

³ Edna Longley, *Poetry in the Wars* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1986), p. 54.

⁴ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2009), p.134.

marginalised aligns him more with social ecology's focus on the political and economic circumstances of dispossession and environmental change. He recognises the complex connections between nature, culture and society because he earned his living by using one of the major tools of culture, literature, to contemplate nature. He is unselfish in his need for contact with nature and does not dream of deserted places but prefers peopled landscapes, possibly because at the time of writing absence was not a theory but a reality caused by war and all its associated grief. For Thomas, those who dwelled close to the land and knew its character well were the best examples of harmonious living and human happiness.

Edward Thomas' intense relationship with rural areas shaped his opinions, friendships, life choices, and writing. It was also the most effective remedy he found to ease the intense feelings of alienation and frustration he regularly experienced, which were diagnosed as neurasthenia at the time but would now be likely to be labelled as depression. This condition was worsened by the burden of responsibility his decision to live by writing brought on him and his family and his long walks became a means of escape from the endless reviews and travel books he produced. His dark moods and severe self criticism motivated his lifelong search for a place where he could feel at ease with himself and with the natural world. His acute sensitivity and social awareness were also central to his fateful decision to enlist, a decision which permanently separated him from the English countryside which was so important to him.

At times Edward Thomas' poetry reflects his fretful, dissatisfied disposition and volatile temperament. His unhappiness and search for meaning reveal themselves in his relentless self questioning and discordant thoughts about himself and his place in the world. The one constant in his personal life as well as in his prose and poetry was the need to immerse himself in the natural world and the act of walking in the countryside aided his thoughts and helped ease his agitation. The encounters he had with rural people during these walks and the stories and folk songs he learnt from them also contributed directly to his work. His personal quest for honesty in the language he used and his fidelity to the truth of rural life marks his work apart from some of the pretty but narrow nature poetry preceding him. He witnessed the Georgian poets being silenced by the outbreak of war and 'was struck by the futility of attempts to live apart from the realities of human affairs'.⁵

The war made many poets view nature as a retreat from reality but Thomas' level of education and general sensitivity made him aware of the romantic lure of the countryside and how the temptation of nostalgia could distort art away from the truth of a place. He resisted colouring rural life with touches of imagination or adorning his language with unnecessary flourishes. Whenever he felt the temptation to fictionalise his experience of a place he explored the impulse overtly, bringing it into the content of the poem. This honesty, alongside his quiet voice and precise, undecorated language has ensured that Edward Thomas' strongest following is amongst other poets, most strikingly R.S. Thomas, Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin, who learnt from him the legacy of poetic truth and economy.

Modernism

Edward Thomas' singular voice does not fit easily into a single literary category nor does his work adhere to a particular school or movement. F. R. Leavis argued against his classification as a Georgian poet, calling him 'a very original poet' with 'a distinctly modern sensibility'⁶. Many discussions of Thomas' work centre on this distinction between being modern and being a modernist. Edward Thomas was open about the influence of writers such as Richard Jefferies, Walter Pater and Walter de la Mare on his early development but his style matured and refined beyond imitation in his prose work, so that he arrived at

⁵ John Dunn, *A Bleak But Honest Resolution: A personal reading of the poetry of Edward Thomas* (Milton Keynes: Study Press, 2006), p.21.

⁶ F.R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation*, (London: Pelican Books, 1979), p.55.

poetry at a stage where he had already ridded himself of these writers' characteristics and deficiencies and found his own voice.

Critics have argued over whether Edward Thomas' poetry should be grouped with the Georgian or modernist poets. Although he was omitted from inclusion in Marsh's 'Georgian Poets' anthologies, a superficial glance at Thomas' poetry would suggest an affinity with Georgian poets in terms of his focus on rural scenes and meditations on nature. Many of his poems open by praising the beauty of a landscape or season but the intensity of Thomas' relationship with nature goes beyond a surface appraisal of a landscape and often subverts the reader's expectations with a bracing change of tone or unseen association. He was undoubtedly influenced by Georgian poets but his response to nature develops beyond other poets of the time to include a complexly psychological aspect, consciously realised, that separates him from the often sentimental, weekend cottage view of the countryside that informs many Georgian poems.

An example of this difference is evident in 'The Wasp Trap', where Thomas praises the beauty and 'pure brightness' of a 'glistening' jar which moonlight touches, making 'The lovely lovelier'. The expression of awe and beauty towards a manmade object whose purpose is to kill, displays a huge shift in perception from other writers of the time. The metaphor of the trap as 'A star', confirms the originality of perception that distances Thomas from other nature writers as well as his commitment to praising earthly things rather than looking to the heavens. In 'But These Things Also', he again extends the gaze of poetry, making the subject of his work the overlooked or minor features in nature. His representation of place and season is unedited and includes the smallest, least pretty marks of a 'chip of flint, and mite | Of chalk; and the small birds' dung | In splashes of purest white'. This is a clear redirection from traditional praise of a new season. Much of the poem's strangeness comes from the transitional state of the poem; 'Spring's here, Winter's not gone', leaving the reader adrift from familiar associations with each season. Unlike much of Georgian poetry, Thomas' writing is not a withdrawal from life or a place to dream but a setting for intense self scrutiny and the landscape in which this examination takes place is not always picturesque or magical but bleak and sometimes unbeautiful.

His willingness to value less attractive elements of nature is seen in 'November', where his focus is on the unpoetic 'Twig, leaf, flint, thorn' underfoot. The unpoetic and unaesthetic mud is praised in the poem because the dark density that makes it visually unappealing is in fact vital in making the sky look so clear and bright in contrast. He offers a new perspective and what is learnt is the necessity of experiencing darkness in order to recognise and fully appreciate beauty. In instances such as these, Thomas' work seems to echo Theodore de Banville's praise of Baudelaire in giving 'beauty to sights that did not possess beauty in themselves, not by making them romantically picturesque, but by bringing to light the portion of the human soul hidden in them'⁷. The poem quietly reveals a new voice in nature poetry, one that 'loves earth' and will not edit out the parts of it that were previously deemed unpoetic. 'November' is also sadly revealing of the changing times he was writing in; mud being able to stand by itself for one of the last times before the next wave of poets made it emblematic of the hardship and suffering of the soldiers in the trenches.

F. R. Leavis criticised Georgian poetry for its loose craftsmanship, vapid musings about the English countryside and tendency to retreat into dream worlds which made the movement 'not so much bad as dead'⁸. David Daiches labels it 'quiet, unambitious verse, restrained in mood and low in temperature...written on a single level, posing no problems

⁷ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The experience of modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p.132.

⁸ Leavis, p.12.

and solving none.⁹ This is a blanket dismissal of Georgian poetry which does not allow for any progress it did make. However, it is an overview that comprehensively separates Edward Thomas from admission to the group and shows his writing to be, at the very least, an advance on the poetry just passed. The intense psychological aspect of his work and the rejection of artificiality or adornment in his description of place mark him apart from Georgian poets and place him more comfortably, though not unquestionably, within the context of modernist poetry. He represents the hidden element of modernism which desired a return to nature but understood that this required new methods of writing about it to confront the modern world.

Although modernism seems on the surface to be city based, Edna Longley argues that 'Urban imagery is no necessary badge of the modern poet'¹⁰ and that Thomas discovered more about continuity, community and ritual than Eliot did in his cosmopolitan fragments. Many of the defining characteristics of modernist poetry are apparent in Thomas' work and in some ways he precedes the later developments of leading modernists. Consistent with more indisputably modernist writers, Thomas' voice is one of an alienated modern man, cast adrift by his separation from a rooted life in tune with natural cycles and searching for meaning in a landscape which is much changed from even a generation before. The poems form an intense search for truth and an obsessional questioning of what is permanent and lasting. However, unlike Eliot, Thomas does not look for enduring quality in fragments of high culture but in the continuity of rural customs and natural processes. He questions anthropocentric conventions of what kind of knowledge is valued in poems such as 'March' which explores the mystery of otherness asking; 'What did the thrushes know?' In listening to their frantic song, the speaker experiences a moment of communion with the birds, feeling that 'Something they knew- I also'. Both man and bird share the knowledge, despite the contradicting evidence of the weather, 'that Spring returns, perhaps tomorrow'. In this early poem Thomas is already reading the countryside and translating the message of birds. His gaze, like Eliot's, is on the mundane, overlooked and ordinary. His encounter with such things is direct, realistic and unflinching, preferring the reality of human and animal life to colouring a scene for personal or poetic purposes.

This poetic ridding of fantasy can be seen explicitly in 'Sedge-Warblers'. The first stanza evokes a pre-Raphaelite style lexis. At the sight of a beautiful landscape the speaker descends into a 'dream', fantasising about the presence of 'beauty, divine and feminine/ [...] a nymph'. But the temptation to lose himself in fantasy is rejected overtly in the second stanza as the speaker forces himself out of his revelries to get 'rid of this dream, ere I had drained | Its poison'. The reality of the place is enough, the water is 'Clearer than any goddess' and does not need further decoration. He even rejects the more poetic voice of the 'lark' for the 'song that lacks all words, all melody' of the sedge-warblers, because the scene is perfect in itself and the birds belong in that place. Again birdsong hints at something beyond human learning and the sedge-warblers seem to understand his lesson; 'Wisely reiterating endlessly | What no man learnt yet, in or out of school'. It is also relevant that at this point larks exist as independent entities in poetry as they will later be linked to the war by the poets in the trenches.

This explicit exploration of the temptation to force narrative onto perception of place and the rejection of fantasy for reality confirms Edward Thomas' dedication to truth. His concern with honesty in his poetry was indistinct from his personality, with his wife Helen commenting that he 'hated ostentation, snobbery, hypocrisy, affectation and sentimentality'¹¹, a strange mixture of characteristics found in modernism and Georgian writing. Although closer to a modernist poet than Georgian, he can also be seen as being

⁹ David Daiches, *Poetry and the Modern World: A Study of Poetry in England between 1900 and 1939* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), p.39.

¹⁰ Edna Longley, *Poems and Last Poems* (Plymouth: Macdonald and Evans, 1978), p.12.

¹¹ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2009), p.10.

'without any literary context, whatsoever'¹² as his poetry seems to transcend categorisation and location due to its simple language and focus on the familiar and every day. Rather than categorising him as part of one group or the other it may be more profitable to see his worked as a continuation and progression of a particular English tradition of nature writing which reaches back from John Clare to Keats and the Romantics.

Although known primarily as a nature poet and having dismissed the influence of his urban roots, Thomas' 'accidentally cockney nativity'¹³ and childhood spent on commons and scrub land of South London was his first encounter with wildlife and shaped his view of nature. His early upbringing in London was the background the countryside was compared with. Unlike his hero Thomas Jefferies, he was not a farmer's son from 'the real country at Swindon'¹⁴, his father's worked for the railways and it was the expansion of the railway system which brought the family to the suburbs of London, as it had brought the other branch of his family to Swindon. Edward Thomas was not cut off from progress and change and had a modern mindset which well understood the conflicting reactions that modernity provoked. He knew and experienced the exhilaration of progress and its resulting fear of change, acknowledging that it was 'hard to make anything like a truce between these two incompatible desires, the one for going on and on over the earth, the other that would settle for ever, in one place as in a grave and have nothing to do with change.'¹⁵

In his fragment of autobiography he states that 'London made no impression'¹⁶ but it moulded his mindset and his identity as a visitor to the country, a modern man with urban roots who longed to escape his early life by going into a landscape completely different to it. At times there seems to be some self deception in his disregarding London as having 'no exercise, no air'¹⁷ as his outdoor upbringing on the commons only began to seem distasteful when he learnt what 'real country' lay beyond it. The reason behind his rejection of London could be more likely to be its association as a place linked to his past and to his uncomfortable relationship with his disapproving father, which fuelled his initial desire to leave. Like many modernist writers of the time he felt himself an exile, seeing Wales as his natural home before he later found an affinity with the region he termed the south country. This feeling of being uprooted and an outsider from his ancestral communities drove his lifelong search for somewhere to feel at home.

However, despite his dislike for the city Thomas did not shut himself away from society but responded 'critically to 'modernity', or the modern condition'¹⁸ He witnessed the interrelated, drastic changes occurring between country and city and knew nature well enough to recognise its resilience and adaptability, pointing out that even disused railway cuttings could be 'gracious and impenetrable sanctuaries for plants and insects'.¹⁹ He was not a reactionary in the face of progress and criticised those who succumbed to the imagined simplicity of rural life and were 'trying to write as if there were no such thing as a Tube'²⁰. He would often spend periods of time in London looking for work and noted without resentment the new mobility of the 'country-bred man with a distinct London accent.'²¹ He

¹² *Poems and Last Poems*, p.408.

¹³ John Moore, ed., *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1983), p.277.

¹⁴ Edward Thomas, *The Childhood of Edward Thomas: A Fragment of Autobiography* (Trowbridge: Faber and Faber, 1983), p.66.

¹⁵ *The South Country*, p.161.

¹⁶ *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, p.74.

¹⁷ *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. by R. George Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.174.

¹⁸ Laurence Coupe ed., *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.61.

¹⁹ Thomas, Edward, *The Country* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1913), pp.58-9.

²⁰ *A language not to be betrayed: Selected prose of Edward Thomas*, ed. by Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1981), p.202.

²¹ *The Country*, p.1.

also knew and understood his readership, which was mainly urban people separated from their country roots by a generation or two.

Even a poem such as 'The Manor Farm', which can be read as a traditional celebration of a drowsy rural scene of 'bliss unchangeable' that 'slept in Sunday silentness', is complicated by the change in tense in the final line; 'This England, Old already, was called Merry'. This recognises the fragility of the scene and questions the previous assumption of its endurance. In the shifting tenses creeps an awareness of a landscape and a way of life moving into the past even as it is written about. Change is not challenged or resisted in Thomas' poetry; at times alterations to the landscape can reveal another aspect of the environment. In 'First Known When Lost' the speaker derides himself for not being attentive enough to the willows that were 'not more than a hedge overgrown' until they had been cut down. However, after initially mourning the loss the change reminds him to look at the ordinary and when he looks again at the changed scene he sees 'A tributary's tributary, rises there'. What is interesting throughout the poems is that Thomas does not criticise human management of nature or the alteration of areas to better suit agriculture. He does not make a definition between how nature constantly evolves and how farmers must work the land to survive too. The subtext of the poem cannot escape from modern events, with the reason that many farmers were cutting down hedges and divides between fields being that this made them easier to work on with a reduced number of workers.

Thomas counts himself as one of 'those modern types who has no home'²² (a word that titles three of his poems) and overtly explores the pervading modernist desire to rediscover community, past and tradition as a counter to the uncertainty of modern life. T.S. Eliot goes back to ancient communities for stability and meaning but Thomas is more contemporary and looks only a generation back, to the country parents or grandparents of modern city dwellers who feel they have 'no tradition about them' and live 'in no ancient way'.²³ In this respect, although his poetic journeys are often solitary, the condition he articulates reflects the malaise of wider society rather than just a personal melancholy. His voice is unique and original but his subject matter uncovers a shared past.

His admiration for gypsies, wanderers and vagrants in his poems is due to their assumed freedom from modern ennui. Their homelessness is a literal one that despite dire poverty gives them a freedom that he is attracted to. In his poems such people are rooted in the earth which they rely on; they have the time to know nature well and are free of middle class ambitions and the restrictions of education on their thinking. However his depiction of their lives does not drift into complete romanticisation because Thomas was a man whose work made him very knowledgeable about modern Britain. He was not reduced to the company of academics or intellectuals as were many modernists but walked across large areas of Britain speaking to people from a variety of backgrounds, gleaming a more comprehensive view of Britain. As a nature writer dependent on London for work he knew the advances in publishing. He wrote to friends about new developments in literature and produced reams of reviews of new books and poetry. He also, like Eliot and Pound, developed a central international literary friendship. His with Robert Frost gave him the confidence to begin writing poetry and gave it a context and comparison. It was also the most modern event of technologically advanced warfare that would exile him for the first time from Britain and all its familiar and loved places and ultimately kill him.

While it was true that he engulfed himself in the natural world to relieve his depression, it was not a naive or innocent search for utopia. Thomas wrote about nature from a new perspective which incorporated the changes and upheavals of the times and disinherited pastoral fantasy which discounts the hardship of rural life. He may never have read Eliot or known modernism by any particular name but he was unusual in praising

²² *The South Country*, p.5.

²³ Edward Thomas, *The Heart of England* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

Pound early on and from his reviewing would have recognised the direction in which such poets were taking poetry. Had he lived it is unlikely that he would have made an allegiance to modernism or any other school and would have remained an outside voice continually experimenting and extending his range but on his own terms; 'He would have founded no school, for he was an individual poet'²⁴ The awareness of the risk of war may have also helped to mould his style and made him write so honestly and directly about nature, death and personal choice. It certainly informed and intensified his personal map of symbols in his poetry, grounding abstract, overwhelming subjects such as death in concrete things he knew such as woods, roads, birds, and paths. He criticised imagists for their elitism and use of obscure symbols. However, his work is often exemplary of their aims, especially in his direct treatment of objects. His symbolic code and imagery is layered rather than the obscure, rejecting the elitism of some aspect of high modernism. He also never reduces nature to simply being a map of poetic symbols but acknowledges its independence from himself and literature.

Thomas is the 'I' in his poetry, his honesty and dislike of decoration does not allow him to wear the masks many modernist poets do or follow a theory of impersonality. But the self consciousness and doubt of modernism are a central aspect of his work. Thomas' poetic voice shares many fears with the urban figure of Prufrock, suggest a pervading problem with modern man that was not limited by place. Whether in society dining rooms or in fields miles away, masculinity shares a crisis over the same questions of desire and failure. This atmosphere of dissatisfaction can be seen in 'Health' where a perfect spring day, which 'Promises all and fails in nothing' reveals the speaker's own failings. He seems trapped in his own body and human limitations that mean that even at peak health he 'could not be as the wagtail running up and down'. His physical limitations are eventually eased by the realisation of the benefits of being human and conscious of all of nature, resolving that 'I am almost proud to love both bird and son, | Though scarce this Spring could my body leap four/ yards'. In 'The Glory' the speaker again finds himself severely failing in comparison with 'The glory of the beauty of the morning'. His listless questioning of how he should face such beauty, what questions he should ask of it and himself and how he can rid himself of his overwhelming unhappiness end only in the despairing conclusion; 'How dreary-swift, with naught to ravel to, | Is Time'. Often nature can provoke happiness or meaning for the speaker in the poem but here the hopelessness comes from the disconnection from nature which leaves the directionless speaker skirting round the outside of nature and 'cannot bite the day to the core.'

Both Eliot and Thomas see evidence of the past in modern landscapes, the marks of humans upon it and the unseen psychological mapping of place that humans adopt to comprehend an area. Both poets are drawn to the mundane, passed by or unseen, swapping huge narratives for the examination of fragments of life. Other aspects of modernism seemed to overlap with his techniques, suggesting a shared mood in the country which went beyond rural/urban divides. Like many other modernist poets Thomas is an early exponent of speech rhythms and uses fragments of song, colloquial language, multiple voices, and the overlap of ancient rituals occurring in modern scenes. Although 'usually called 'modern' but not 'modernist', on the grounds of the modesty of his formal experimentation as a poet'²⁵, his poetry has an overt exploration of language and 'an uncommonly precise choice of words' which 'constitutes the newness of Edward Thomas' sensibility' and reveals the 'stark originality of his perception'²⁶. His structure and form is often formal and traditional but within such forms he plays with free verse rhythms, the poetry of speech inflections, unusual rhymes, and striking syntax. In particular he shares several traits of other modernist

²⁴ Daiches, p.72.

²⁵ Coupe, p.61.

²⁶ P.P Raveendran, *Poetry and the New Sensibility: Readings in Thomas, Owen and Rosenberg* (New Dehli: Arnold Associates, 1996) p.47.

poets. He and Sitwell employ synaesthesia as a way of refreshing description and rethinking representations of the natural world; he links nature and war as Rickword did and experiences the same psychological reliance on nature as Mew. His exclusion from the modern canon was most likely due to his rural centric poetry but his poems explore the same questions of history, place, roots, community, and tradition that obsessed more celebrated modernist writers.

Poetic aims and writing style

In 1915, Edward Thomas wrote to his friend Eleanor Farjeon that he wanted to 'get rid of the last rags of rhetoric and formality'²⁷ in his writing. His friend Robert Frost said after his death that his aim and concern in writing had always been 'to touch earthly things and come as near to them in words as words would come'.²⁸ His years of describing the countryside in prose had served as an excellent apprenticeship for beginning poetry, refining his style and sharpening his descriptive skills and observations.

His poetry tries to get as close as possible to the thing he is representing through a direct engagement with language whilst also acknowledging that nature is more than a linguistic construct and words can never completely represent all it is. His concern is with the truth of representation and any alterations he is tempted to add because of personal feeling are explored explicitly. This led to an obsession with language, its texture, vitality, limits, and potential beyond human usage. 'Words' is a humble but direct statement of commitment to poetry. It has the tentative tone of a prayer and a plea as he sees himself as an inert instrument of English words, to be used 'As the winds use | A crack in a wall | [...] To whistle through'. The poem is an attempt to unify language and nature and highlight the relationship between the two, giving equal value to each as language is 'as dear As the earth which you prove | That we love'. The connection is made strongly in the poem in the inversion of aspect of nature being used to describe language rather than the more conventional question of how language can be used to describe nature. He shows knowledge of the contradictions of language in being 'light as dreams | Tough as oak' and 'Strange and sweet | Equally, | And familiar'. The poem is patriotic and extremely personal, self referentially bringing in his well loved use of houses, birds, nature, place names, trees and weather to celebrate his beginnings as a poet. His signature style of undulating thoughts particularly suits the subject of the poem in matching the complexity of language and its mystery which cannot be pinned down or reduced to a single opinion. It also sees him experimenting with structure and the shape of poems on the pages and its effect on the power of each word. Its self awareness and conscious exploration of the writing process and linguistics make it one of his most striking and modern poems.

Thomas' wanderings round Britain and interest in old rural communities was part of a personal search for a place to call home, where he could at last be comfortable with himself. This contentment was first denied to him by his own fractious nature and then, as detailed in 'The Owl', by the war. In an essay on John Clare he admires and respects the way his words are 'alive, and not only alive but still half-wild and imperfectly domesticated' entities²⁹ as opposed to a more deliberate poet such as Hardy's controlling presence which did not allow anything to sneak in. The complexity of Thomas' work stems from the unexpected symbolism and meaning that emerges from his study of nature and his search for a home, either from his unconscious or from the readers' interpretation of his imagery. One aspect of his work that separates him from other modernist writers is his aim is not to 'make it new' but to find words that can be 'worn new' ('Words') through excavation and surprising application. However, beyond the supposed move of modernists for

²⁷ Eleanor Farjeon, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.110.

²⁸ Cooke, p.47.

²⁹ Thomas, Edward, *A Language not to be Betrayed: Selected Prose of Edward Thomas* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1981), pp.29-30.

experimentation is the shared excavating of the past for more meaningful lives, Pound in the troubadours, Thomas in the rural poor and lives lived close to nature. His concern is always truth. Like many other modernist poets he made use of colloquial language with an authenticity of someone who was well acquainted with rural dialects and inflections.

Edward Thomas' poetry is based on specifics and anchored in time, season and place. He repeatedly delights in place names and their history as well as musing on the folk names of flowers and lists them with the reverence of prayer. The naming of things stems from his delight at reading maps and learning the names of the tributaries of the Thames in school and appeals to his sense of the local and specific which imbue his poetry with such clear detail. The poems are linked by birds, flowers, rain, storms, war, roads, memories, and glimpses of beauty. These exist as both concrete events and as a recurring chain of symbols. For example, his poem 'Roads' confirms his love for roads and explores their physical presence as well as their personal symbolism to him 'a silent companion always ready for us, whether it is night or day, wet or fine, whether we are calm or desperate'³⁰. The appeal of roads is in their permanency beyond most other man made things and their shared history. In the poem roads represent a link between the living and the dead, the journey of life with the uncertainty of not knowing if 'The next turn may reveal | Heaven' or 'may Hell conceal'. They also have personal significance as they show the narrowing of his choices in life, the fateful decision to enlist meaning 'Now all roads lead to France'. He will now follow a single road to war and possible death but was also freed from the agitation of indecision and personal choice. This 'near-morbid fascination with the marks of the long dead'³¹ sees roads as the meeting point between the living with their 'heavy [...] tread' and the dead who 'Returning lightly dance'. A characteristic honesty in Thomas' writing faces the risks of war face on but the familiarity of the metaphor of a road for this journey eases the prospect of leaving by giving it a historical perspective of the cycle of life and death, reaching back to when the roads were first animal tracks.

Thomas often combined his symbols to create a linked subtext to his poetry which would be familiar to readers well acquainted with his work. This can be seen in 'The Path' which has the dark intensity of Hansel and Gretel (which he thought one of the greatest stories ever written) in its description of a road which 'is houseless, and leads not to school. To see a child is rare there.' The dark threat of this path off the main road of most travellers also holds an element of being a 'fancied place where men have wishes to go | And stay'. The fantasy element echoes de la Mare's knowledge of the seduction of mystery until the abrupt, stilted ending; 'till, sudden, it ends where the woods end' show the pure fear of the unknown and the end of fantasy. When the familiar pathway and forest end there is only oblivion. The poem clearly demonstrates the clarity with which the symbols of a road as journey lead to a forest symbolising death. The mix of a child's sense of fantasy with an adult thrill of death clash strikingly, showing the darker side of nature.

A curiosity about the naming of things stretches through Thomas' poetic career and makes his poems precise and specific. For Seamus Heaney, place names are a 'magical reality' combining the known with the unknown and suggesting a human presence and history³². Thomas' poetry is an exploration of sources and also a delight in the distance between the sign and signifier and linguistic history of names. 'Women He Liked' explores a specific example of human presence on the landscape. The character of Bob is defined through his love of 'most living things, | But a tree chiefly'. His small act of planting elms down a track begins another story of place and as the track becomes disused the elms and 'the name alone survives, Bob's Lane'. The humble effect of a farmer's action becomes his legacy and the place bears traces of him, bringing his human story and presence into its history.

³⁰ Edward Thomas, *The Icknield Way* (London: Wildwood House Ltd., 1980), p.2.

³¹ *The South Country*, p.10.

³² Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).

'Old Man' also explores the relationship between names and what they represent but it is a much darker and psychologically complex poem. It begins as an expression of delight in the irrationality of the naming of a plant and the lost human presence behind the words. Typically it is not the scientific or Latin names he uses but the common ones as he considers the distance between the reality of the plant and its two, oppositional names; 'in the name there's nothing | To one that knows not Lad's-love, or Old Man'. The reason for the naming is lost and the plant's form 'clings not to the names' showing the limits of language in fully representing its subject. The poem moves at the pace of thought but darkens towards the end when the broader consideration of forgotten links with the past is narrowed into a personal reflection of what is lost when memory fails. The attempt to return to the past through triggering memories through smell; 'Sniff them and think and sniff again and try | Once more to think what it is I am remembering' end in vain; 'I have mislaid the key'. Beyond consciousness, memory and known places there is no associations and only the frightening emptiness of 'an avenue, dark, nameless, without end' and times,

Thomas' representations of rural life try to get as close to the truth as possible. He is 'sincere and sensitive'³³ and always honest. In 'Wind and Mist' he writes as one who has once been captivated by the idea of rural bliss but has now come out of it and sees it in its reality. The perfect weather makes the landscape appear unblemished and tricks one of the speakers into imagining the empty house there was full of 'happy eyes' and 'happy feet'. The second speaker seems a more experienced version of the first, also praising the landscape but knowing the reality of it; 'I did not know it was the earth I loved | Until I tried to live there in the clouds'. The dream of the house turned into a horror of 'day after day, mist-mist' brought 'chaos surging back'. Only bad luck, illness and unhappiness came from the oppressive house, which from outside looked so inviting. Now he has rid himself of false ideology and would return again with his new knowledge. In his search for an understanding of the countryside Edward Thomas wants only the reality of rural life not a pastoral pastiche or the caricature of bumbling peasants. His respect for rural people and folk knowledge is shown when he wrote; 'When a poet writes, I believe he is often only putting into words what such another old man puzzled out among the sheep'.³⁴ His encounters with such people are one of his chief delights in that they take him out of his own thoughts and provide pleasure in their intriguing language and wisdom. His atheism also gives him a certain freedom of perception. The natural world is not related to any preordained order for him but follows its own cycles, linked to human rituals. Having shed the stiff Sunday clothes which began his separation from formal religion, he then strips the excess in his language and the decoration in his description. For him, nature holds meaning and beauty enough in itself and does not need a divine presence or a poet's improvement to validate it.

His exploration of language and his ambition to get as close to a true representation as possible sometimes took him beyond human language. In 'I Never Saw That Land Before' he sees a purity in the sounds of nature and pledges to use 'as the trees and birds did, | A language not to be betrayed'. This honesty of expression appeals to his aims for truth even beyond human usage. The end 'whispers' also mirror his quiet voice and attentive nature. The poem also imagines a perfect reader, someone with a similar sensitivity who sees what is hidden within such sounds and will 'answer when such whispers bid'. In 'The Word', a 'pure thrush word' is paradoxically 'an empty thingless name' and the one thing that is 'remembered yet'. The sound is not denied importance simply on the basis that is beyond human understanding. His reference to it triggers a sounds memory in the reader's mind. The sound of the thrush is a signifier without a tangible sign which nonetheless is more permanent and significant to the speaker than many human words. The subjects of Thomas'

³³ Leavis, p.57.

³⁴ *The Country*, p.9.

poems are often those of loss and forgetting and the awareness of something being lost without being able to identify what. Whereas Eliot explored the limits of language and its meaning by employing ancient or foreign languages such as Sanskrit, Thomas' search was rooted in nature and had an immediacy and egalitarianism which did not exclude those who he was writing about. He follows the roots of language right back to sounds and emissions in animas which defy human meaning but not human significance. Thomas' affinity with nature celebrated its otherness and mystery but his sensitivity to birds meant that their songs and calls caused deep a deep emotional response in him. This reaction is shown in 'The Unknown Bird', where a strange link is drawn between the complexity of his sadness and the sound of a single bird which only seems to communicate to him and seems to understand the complexity of his melancholy. The closeness and distance of this animal from himself is stated in the final lines as remembering it makes him 'Light as that bird, wandering beyond my shore'.

Other linguistic features of Thomas' poetry include a syntax which is often disordered and often uses inversions, repetitions and oppositions in a way which foreshadows the philosophical questioning of Eliot in *Four Quartets*. The difference is that Eliot's wavering was linked to the contemplation of religious mysteries whilst Thomas' explored the mysteries of the physical world. The easy rhythm of Thomas' poems give the impression of listening to a natural voice speaking informally but knowledgeably about nature as they walk through the landscape. The authenticity of his voice makes the poems sometime appear as casual observations with an effortless flow. However, this belies the craftsmanship behind the easy sound and throughout the poems there is an awareness of the importance of line endings, cadences, punctuation, half rhymes and caesuras.³⁵ Although his poetry is not obscure, its meaning is most certainly layered so that one reading may give an impression but the poems only truly reveal their depth after further study and contemplation. His writing is not overworked or controlled but it is full of ambiguities and questions left unanswered.

**Postscript to 'The Edward Thomas Memorial Stone'
by Richard Emeny**

Colin Thornton's interesting article in the last newsletter on the planning and erection of the Memorial Stone on the Shoulder of Mutton above Steep brought to mind two connected items. The first concerns Edward Eastaway Thomas, nephew of the poet and a son of Julian Thomas. As a teenager he attended the ceremony, and later that day decided to return to the Stone for quiet contemplation. When he arrived there, he discovered in a crevice in the Stone a piece of paper and made a note of its appearance and contents, after which he returned it to its crevice, where presumably it remained until wind and rain destroyed it. The following is his note:

Transcript of unsigned M.S. discovered in cavity in large sarsen stone erected on
"Shoulder of Mutton Hill" (Steep nr. Petersfield) 1937
Size 4.5" x 2.5" (edges frayed)

³⁵ Cuthbertson and Newlyn, p.73.

Glossy surface, rear side yellow in colour probably wrapping of confectionery intended to minimise tedium of long speeches & emotional display (also possibly fly-leaf torn from inexpensive diary or other small book).

Calligraphy characters irregular, frequent recourse to underlining. Some letters in heavy type seemingly obscuring letters underneath (as if the scribe was uncertain of correct spelling). Two words doubtful

Style that of an extempore epitaph inspired by moral indignation.

Text

" in loving remembrance of my dear dad* who help to build his old home, also this big* one here he climbd* this hill to eat his bread & cheese, steep his old home 12 children born in steep and neberhood, died Dec 1936 aged 91 and 9 month*."

*heavy type

Edward Eastaway Thomas served in naval intelligence in the Second World War and was subsequently recruited to MI6 by Ian Fleming, partly on account of his facility with and knowledge of Germanic languages. The meticulous care with which he recorded the details of the scrap of paper suggests that such qualities could well have attracted Fleming's attention as well.

About the same time that E .E. Thomas was recording his find, another young man, who had attended the ceremony as a member of the public, was writing to his fiancée: A copy of the letter was sent to the Thomas family many years later when its author by then an old man went into residential accommodation. The copy is unclear in a few places, so I have inserted where this affects the meaning.

My dear Kathleen,

This is another "escapist" letter. I intended to wait until yours came tomorrow, but it is silly really to "reply" to a letter, or at least to reply to letters from those whom one loves. After all you are not a firm. If then you receive this tomorrow you need not think that there will be no other letter forthcoming for a week or so; besides why should my Mondays be cheered by a letter and not yours?

However, please be a firm for a moment " We have received your package containing book and journal together with covering letter dated Oct 1st, for which we thank you. A remittance to cover postage will follow shortly." i.e. when the post office opens.

It was very nice of you to meet my mother on Thursday evening. Thank you. I was able to see her and Miss Slade as they passed through Farnborough yesterday. It was only for about a second and a half it is true, as they were going quite fast, but one couldn't let them pass unhailed. I hope the holiday will do my mother good.

Returning to the first sentence, I had better explain what I am escaping from- if I can. After "Three Comrades" I have been reading Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" and I think it's the last word. The book concludes on the same theme that death may crush loveliness and dreams and the world must still go on- and will go on, uncaring. When two people love, they immediately expose themselves to whatever blows fate or chance may deal and there is no remedy against the blow except the numbing effect of time, in itself more bitter than the first pain.

Dullness then seems to be the only anaesthetic. I know there should be comfort in one's religion, but whatever afterlife we have seems but poor compensation for present wrecking us, that is not quite what I mean - I don't really agree with the theory that God hurts us out of benevolence and that "all is for the best", or that by welcoming afflictions now we acquire merit hereafter. By being brave, possibly, but not through mere trouble alone.

All of which means just that I have suddenly realised how I should feel if I were to lose you. Perhaps not "suddenly", but never with such terrible clarity. Do you "live" your reading so vividly or is it just an idiotically weak trait in me?

Both yesterday and today have been of that kind we call autumnal, not so much depressing- any season can produce those- but sad and mournful. These and yesterday's events make me..... These things being quite impossible, the only alternative is to write to you.

I found yesterday that the ceremony was to be at 2.30 and I rode hard to Petersfield after seeing my mother. There was a sort of luminous light over everything, rather like last Saturday and it was very warm. The road to Petersfield runs straight from Farnham and one leaves it at a village called Sheet. Steep is only about a mile up a by-road. I had seen great wooded hills through the haze on my way down and I now approached them directly, along deep lanes. There were beech woods everywhere and the ground was brown with their fallen leaves. The AA had put up temporary signs in the village, directing one towards the hills and then down a very narrow lane. There were cars going that way and a young girl with long hair streaming over her shoulders, riding a bicycle. Presently we came to a car park above which the hills rose steeply. There is no doubt where the village gets its name. There was a crowd of people up on the hill.

I had been hot when riding but in climbing one just stewed. Everyone was climbing slowly.....people of all ages. A union jack was draped over the stone and six trumpeters in charge of a corporal stood behind it.

I had not long to wait. A gentleman easily recognizable as John Masefield arrived and we made a circle around the stone. He called for "Mrs Thomas" and a lady, wearing a soft grey hat and what looked like a brown suede leather jacket, with grey hair and a kind and lovely face, came to stand beside him. Mr Masefield has a clear voice and, although he does not appear to exert himself, his words were perfectly audible,

He spoke of early associations with Edward Thomas: how they and others met in a Soho cafe to discuss the literature of escape, then current. (You see where I stole the word - but they were escaping from bricks and mortar). Their heroes were Hardy, Cunningham Graham (sic) and Hudson. Hudson was a frequent visitor at their meetings. He (Masefield) spoke of Edward Thomas's voice, which he said was the most beautiful he had known, and of his love for the countryside. I had hoped that he might read some of Edward

Starlings used to sit there with bubbling throats
 Making a spikey beard as they chattered
 And whistled and kissed, with heads in air,
 Till they thought of something else that mattered.

He expressed thanks to Lord Horder for the gift of the hill to the nation.

Lord Horder made a short speech, in which he explained that he was not the owner of the hill but only its guardian, and drew the flag from the stone.

Masefield and Mrs Masefield, Lord Horder and Mrs Thomas, with I think several of her children then descended the hill and after an interval most of the crowd followed them. After some time a flag was waved from a window of Lord Horder's house down in the valley and at the command "Reveille- sound!" the six trumpeters began. Heard at close quarters, the harmonised trumpets sounded very fine. Among those hills the sound must have been even more impressive when heard at a distance. Then the last of the crowd melted away.

I took some photographs of the stone and I wish I could have taken some of the surroundings..... will give you an idea perhaps. (*There follows a very indistinct sketch of the view from the Stone*). The hill is a rounded ridge covered with small trees and bushes. On each side two tongues of hill run down to the valley, about 200 feet below, and each is densely covered with trees. These were lovely, a mass of dark green with occasional splashes of brown. The valley with its houses looks peaceful. The village is over a hill opposite and just out of sight. Small hills fill all the horizon.

The tablet is of bronze and of octagonal shape and is let into an upright sarsen stone. On the tablet is engraved the following inscription

EDWARD THOMAS

POET

Born in Lambeth 3rd March 1878

Killed in the Battle of Arras 9th April 1917

AND I ROSE UP AND KNEW
THAT I WAS TIRED
AND CONTINUED MY JOURNEY

I am sending you the cutting from the "Sunday Times" which describes the ceremony. Once, at the age of 11 or 12, my headmaster suggested that I adopted the career of reporter. How good a reporter I should have been is shown by the fact that I was unaware of two-thirds of the ceremony and (I am rather disappointed about this) was unaware of the presence of Henry Williamson and Walter de la Mare (supposing they were on the hill). I did indeed at the time think that they were two men likely to be there but I did not know Walter de la Mare and could see no one very like the pictures of Henry Williamson. One old gentleman had been Edward Thomas's schoolmaster (I overheard him say) and there was a pale man with reddish brown hair and a moustache came to speak to him, but whether that was either of the two I do not know. I was chiefly interested in Mrs Thomas. It must have been rather trying and strange for her but I was glad she did not wear black. Of course she must be over fifty by now - Edward Thomas himself would have been fifty-nine. I felt that we were all intruding on her and that it was rather unfair that the author of "As It Was" and "World Without End" should have to face all our eyes.

From Steep I rode through Petersfield and then to Godsfield to put up the notices I should have put up some time ago. I did not stay the night but was back here by a quarter to ten.

That is all my weekend. Today has been dull and negative except while writing to you.

The copy of the letter is unsigned, but that may be because an uncopied more personal message came at the end.

*

A Note on the Memorial Stone
by Jeff Cooper

Colin Thornton is right that the idea for the memorial stone came from Rowland Watson, but the first meeting of a group to discuss the proposal was on June 1st, 1935, in London. People present at the meeting included Walter de la Mare, Wilfrid Gibson, Andrew Young, Lascelles Abercrombie and John Moore (who was writing *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas*, which was 'blessed' by the meeting as it had been approved by Helen Thomas). A general committee was set up at this meeting, and also an executive committee whose first responsibility was to contact the National Trust and 'enquire if they know of a suitable piece of country at a suitable price to be bought and dedicated as the ET memorial. ... If the right piece of land can be found and bought, a tree or clump of trees might be planted with an inscribed stone as a more defined memorial.' Then all went quiet, but in November 1935 a circular by Ian MacAlister was sent to various people, saying that the time had come to erect a simple memorial to Edward Thomas. A preliminary general meeting was called for 11 January 1936 at RIBA in Portland Place, London, and the executive committee met on January 14th, 1936 at Clifford Bax's place in Piccadilly. Helen Thomas chose the general location of the memorial. The ball had started rolling, and a letter was drafted by Henry Nevinson which was sent to the *Times* for publication on March 2nd, 1936.

There was one significant person who would have nothing to do with the memorial: Ezra Pound. In March 1936 he wrote, 'At a time when 5 million English are fed worse than rats I consider an appeal for monuments to be FILTH and the type of dithering dilettante who puts off investigation of monetary systems, usury and the means of feeding humanity so far below the level of apes that I am perhaps foolish in spending the price of postage stamp on them.' The letter was full of similar invective, ending 'The spirit of parliament, your government, and MOST British writers is intellectual cadishness.' Some people might say he had a point!

Jeff also points out that one of the ideas that came up at the meeting on 1 June 1935 was 'a memorial edition of the prose (selected)' – this will finally be achieved by the six-volume OUP edition.

Jeff Cooper is the new Chair of the Friends of the Dymock Poets.

Edward and Helen Thomas in Battersea and Wandsworth

(A talk by Richard Purver, illustrated with readings in prose and poetry by Anne Harvey,
for the Wandsworth Society)

*This is an edited version of the talk given by Richard Purver on behalf of the Fellowship at the request of the Wandsworth Society at their AGM, held at West Side Church, at the corner of Melody Road and Allfarthing Lane, on 24 March 2011. Richard opened the talk by referring to his own family background in the area, his mother Hilda Evershed coming from Wandsworth and his father William Purver from Battersea, and past Fellowship activities held locally, including readings by Anne Harvey of Edward Thomas's poetry, for example at Wandsworth Museum in October 2005 to coincide with the exhibition *Our Country: the Battersea and Wandsworth of Edward Thomas*. A version of this article appeared in the Christmas 2011 Bedside edition of the Wandsworth Society newsletter.*

The writer and poet Edward Thomas was born in March 1878 in Lambeth and moved with his parents to Battersea when he was about two. After his marriage to Helen Noble they moved to Kent and then Steep in Hampshire, and finally High Beech in Epping Forest. He was killed in the First World War at the battle of Arras in April 1917. In this talk I would like to concentrate on the idea of locality and the way our lives unfold within surroundings which acquire a lasting meaning for us. In the case of Edward and Helen Thomas they left a record of their memories and experiences and we can still visit the streets and houses where their descriptions and vignettes evoke real lives lived in these particular places in the late Victorian and Edwardian period.

Edward's father and mother Philip Thomas and Mary Townsend were born in South Wales and came to London when Philip obtained a post as a civil servant with the Board of Trade. He was involved in local Liberal politics and gave lectures at Battersea Town Hall for the Battersea Ethical Society. Edward was the eldest of six brothers. The first house the Thomases lived at in Battersea was 49 Wakehurst Road, near to Wandsworth Common. In his posthumously published autobiography, *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, Edward talks of his explorations of the varied habitat of the Common and games played there:

A railway ran across the Common in a deep bushy cutting, and this I supposed to be a natural valley and had somehow peopled it with unseen foxes. The long mounds of earth now overgrown with grass and gorse heaped up at my side of the cutting from which they had been taken were 'hills' to us ... Equal to them in height and steepness, and almost equal as playing grounds, were the hills of snow lining Northcote Road, the principal street, one winter ... the Common ... was large enough to provide us with many surprises and discoveries for years. We could spend a day on it without thinking it small or having to retrace our steps.

Edward gives a precise description of the nearby roads and the house itself, explaining that even when new the 'little semi-detached one-storied pale brick houses' had distinguishing features, for example the beginnings of creepers on the wall or flowers in the gardens, and because the people were different:

Our street like three or four others parallel to it was in two halves, running straight up the opposite sides of a slight valley, along the bottom of which ran the principal street of mixed shops and private houses. Our house was low down in the half which ran up westwards to Bolingbroke Grove, the eastern boundary of Wandsworth Common ... Inside from the front door to the back of the house there was as long a passage as possible, the rooms opening out of it. The staircase ran up to a room with an opaque glass window in the door, a second room, and two others connected by a door ... Through the open window ... one Mayday, Jack-in-the-Green bounded in to beg a penny, showing white teeth, white eyes, black face, but the rest of him covered and rippling with green leaves. The passage was a playground when it was too wet or too dark to be out of doors. Here, when I had [a brother was old enough to] run, we two raced up and down the passage to be pounced upon by the servant out of a doorway and swallowed up in her arms with laughter.

Edward Thomas attended the local Board School, Belleville Road as an infant and was admitted to the main school in April 1886, his name appearing in the register in the Welsh form of 'Edwy'. The school of course is still there and housed in the original building. In his autobiography Edward describes his teachers and fellow pupils, the lessons and the games in the playground, remembering 'crawling in and bursting out ... We were huddled close together in great lofty rooms with big windows and big maps and on Mondays a smell of carbolic soap'. He tells how boys gathered in large groups for mock battles on the Common and these could become more serious when the local grammar school boys, probably from Emanuel, taunted the 'Boardy Blags', that is blackguards, from the Board School.

Edward Thomas's waking life as a child was divided, as he says, 'between home, school and the streets and neighbouring common'. There was much to interest him: fishing in the ponds left by gravel workings on the Common, touring the various shops, hanging round with friends for hours smoking brown paper cigarettes, mooning about hoping to catch sight of girls he liked and visits to the blacksmith and pigeon fanciers. He took to keeping pigeons, rabbits and white mice himself and says of homing pigeons that 'Their high circlings visible from our back garden, and their rushing lower flight between the chimney pots, were sublime to me'.

Inspired by his admiration for the writings of Richard Jefferies, Edward kept diary notes of his natural history observations, recording for example on 13 April 1895 'Swallows, house-martins and sand-martins came to Wandsworth Common in fine blue weather'. These diaries formed the basis of his first book, *The Woodland Life*, which was published in 1897, when he was nineteen.

The family moved to 61 Shelgate Road in 1888, where a plaque in memory of Edward Thomas was placed in 1949. After attending a private school for a while Edward won a scholarship to Battersea Grammar School at the top of St John's Hill, on the site later occupied by the Granada Cinema, and in due course went on to St Paul's in Hammersmith.

Edward was now nearer to Clapham Common, which he says on foggy nights 'was in many ways like desert undiscovered country, yet perfectly harmless' and where on one occasion he was proud to have his middle stump bowled clean out of the ground by the famous socialist MP John Burns (who has his own plaque at 110 North Side).

The children attended the Unitarian chapel in East Hill at the insistence of their father. Although it has to be said that Edward detested the constraints of Sunday School and being expected to discuss the evening sermon afterwards at dinner, his connection with the Unitarian Church did have a profound effect on his life as he received the support of the minister, Reverend Tarrant, with his early writing and it was through his recommendation that Edward met another member of the congregation, the literary critic and journalist James Ashcroft Noble and his daughter Helen.

Helen Noble was born in Liverpool in July 1877 and attended Wimbledon High School when the family moved back to London in 1893, after a previous stay of two years. They lived initially at 15 The Grove in Wandsworth, which later became 37 St Ann's Hill (just along the road from here). The house was part of a section called Agincourt Villas, which was destroyed in July 1944 by a flying bomb. This was where Helen and Edward first met:

I remember so well that very first meeting. We lived then in a little new villa in a row, in a new road quite near Wandsworth Common. The front room was the dining-room, and the piano was there; the back room at the end of the passage looking on to the tiny garden, which was kept full of flowers, was my father's study. This was lined with books, and in the middle of the room was his knee-hole writing-table ... We knew the strange boy was coming. Our Unitarian minister had asked my father to look at some of his work and see if it was any good, and Father had thought so highly of it that we had already nicknamed the boy 'The Genius'. Perhaps we had been told he was shy; anyway we left the study and went into the dining-room, and when he came he was shown straight in to Father, who was waiting for him. We girls were playing The Mikado on the piano and singing, and between whiles laughing and talking of the boy and wondering what he would be like ... My father introduced us and our eyes met – the boy's solemn grey eyes rather over-shadowed by drooping lids with long lashes. He did not smile, but looked very steadily at me and I at him as he took my hand with a very hard and long grip ... though I thought him shy and awkward and silent I liked him and wanted to see him again.

The Nobles moved to 6 Patten Road, close to the west side of Wandsworth Common, in December 1895. James Ashcroft Noble became a mentor to Edward Thomas, who dedicated

his first book to him after he died in 1896. The funeral service was conducted by Mr Tarrant at the Unitarian chapel. James Ashcroft Noble and in 1907 his wife Esther, were buried in Wandsworth Cemetery, where the gravestone carries a touching inscription recording the admiration and love of his 'comrades in letters'. We are told that Edward and Helen tended the grave with wildflowers. I came across the tombstone by chance in the 1990s when looking for those of my Evershed ancestors.

Edward was still a student at Oxford when he and Helen married at Fulham Register Office in June 1899 and Helen went to stay with his family at 61 Shelgate Road while expecting their first child Merfyn. Helen would take Merfyn to Clapham Common and enjoyed looking for signs of spring flowers in the large overgrown gardens of the old country houses of bygone city merchants in the surrounding streets.

Many children have been born in the houses around us here of course and will have been referred to in private letters and diaries, but we have a published account by Helen of Merfyn's birth at 61 Shelgate Road in her memoir *As It Was*, with a detailed description of their room at the top of the house as it became vividly memorable to her when the labour started:

I remember standing at the door of our room and seeing it with a new vision – this attic reaching over the whole house, with a large old-fashioned fireplace with hobs at each side, on which a copper kettle always stood. It had a sloping roof, and a dormer window at each end. Half of it was Edward's study, and our sitting-room, where his books, his fishing rods, his clay pipes and walking-sticks were kept, and where he wrote and read, and I had spent such happy hours sewing and reading and dreaming. The other half was our bedroom, with the big bed, the bow-fronted chest of drawers, the low rocking-chair, and the large semi-circular dressing-table with a muslin petticoat round it. On the floor was an old faded carpet that had once been gay with bunches of impossible flowers. In the study part was a huge arm-chair ... a replica of one that Edward had at Oxford. On the mantelpiece were the brass candlesticks I had given him for his birthday, his tobacco jar, and a miniature of his mother as a young and beautiful girl. The pictures in the study were two old silhouettes of Welsh ancestors above the plain oak table, which served as a desk; a large photograph of the Vénus Accroupie, which Richard Jefferies so much admired; an old rather ribald ballad, with a coloured picture at the top, which we used to sing to a jolly tune; and a funny old painting on glass of Tintern Abbey. In the bedroom part was a large coloured reproduction of Botticelli's Primavera, and his round Virgin and Child, and a water-colour drawing of my father.

I had always loved this room, and on that day every detail of it imprinted itself on my mind for ever. I was content that it should be the birth-room of my first-born ... On an oak chest which Edward had made, near to the fireplace, stood the cradle.

It is interesting to compare this passage with Edward Thomas's identification with a similar place in his poem *The Long Small Room*.

Edward and Helen lived for three months from November 1900 in a 'half-house' or 3-room upper flat at 117 Atheldene Road, a new street in Earlsfield, 'obviously doomed to become a slum' according to Helen, although it had a good sitting-room which they had distempered in a warm French grey. She says there was 'a little kitchen with steps leading from it to a tiny squalid back-yard, used by the downstairs people for keeping ramshackle rabbit hutches and hanging out washing which was always wet and never clean'. The tenants downstairs, whom she regarded as 'terribly poor and degraded' often moved out in the middle of the night to avoid paying the rent. No 117 has now gone. It may be this street which is referred to in an essay of 1902, *Recollections of November*, in which Edward Thomas contemplates the moon and fragments of nature seen from his room.

They then lived from February to October 1901 at 7 Nightingale Parade, Nightingale Lane in Balham. This was a flat above a parade of shops which is still there on the corner of Blandfield Road, close to where Edward's parents moved to, 13 (now No 12) Rusham Road.

Balham and the surrounding district is the explicit setting of Edward Thomas's only novel, *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, published in 1913. The centrepiece of the story is an imagined dwelling, Abercorran House, based on the large old houses with grounds still existing locally, many of which would be knocked down and replaced with new villas:

To-day the jackdaws at least, if ever they fly that way, can probably not distinguish Abercorran Street and Wilderness Street from ordinary streets. For the trees are every one of them gone, and with them the jackdaws. The lilies and carp are no longer in the pond, and there is no pond. I can understand people cutting down trees – it is a trade and brings profit – but not draining a pond in such a garden as the Wilderness and taking all its carp home to fry in the same fat as bloaters, all for the sake of building a house that might just as well have been anywhere else or nowhere at all.

The novel also contains an interesting description of 'Our Country', which seems from its reference to The George Inn to be the area around Merton and Morden, then still a rural location beyond the suburbs, which is also mentioned in *The Childhood* as a favourite place that Edward and his friends used to walk out to from Battersea. His life-long capacity for walking long distances was shown early in these treks; he also often walked to Wimbledon Common or Richmond Park, sometimes taking the train to Barnes from Clapham Junction in the latter case or to go further afield. Starting very early on a Sunday on occasions he 'walked to Kingston and back in time for morning service'. Helen later joined him on some of these expeditions.

The theme of another early essay, *Broken Memories*, is that of walking out across the railway bisecting Wandsworth Common and through the encroaching streets to the fields and woods, and *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* features a detailed description of a typical long road leading north into the suburbs from the London countryside, past building sites fronted with hoardings, a new cemetery and a factory, isolated blocks of new houses, an old inn with a Gypsy's cart outside and then the Victoria Hotel, 'built in the Jubilee year of that sovereign', old cottages and the overgrown gardens of empty or soon to-be-abandoned dwellings:

Beyond the 'Victoria' the road straightened itself after a twist, and was now lined by a hundred houses of one pattern but broken by several branch streets. These were older houses of grey stucco, possessing porches, short flights of steps up to the doors, basements, and the smallest of front gardens packed with neglected laurel, privet, marigold, and chickweed ... a man walking [to London] would begin to feel tired, and would turn off the pavement into the road, or else cross to the other side where the scattered new shops and half-built houses had as yet no footway except uneven bare earth. On this side the turnings were full of new houses and pavements, and admitted the eye to views of the welter of slate roofs crowding about the artificial banks of the river which ran as in a pit.

Although Edward Thomas deplored the crowded brick streets of the city he was also fascinated by and saw beauty in them, and despite his move away in 1901 and his role as a chronicler of the countryside in prose and verse, his involvement in the South London suburb he grew up in continued all his life. He visited his family and friends here regularly over the years, and wrote some of his early poems while staying with his parents when stationed near London after enlisting in the Artists' Rifles in July 1915.

Edward and Helen's own children came to know the area in turn through staying with their relatives. Their third child Myfanwy remembered being taken for long walks on Wandsworth Common by her paternal grandfather and the fierce Welsh cook named Emma who occupied the basement of the 'tall, dark house' in Balham.

Another overnight visitor to Rusham Road was the American poet Robert Frost who encouraged Edward Thomas to write poetry after years of producing a series of prose books on a wide variety of subjects as a professional author.

Edward continued his early practice of making natural history notes in his diaries, observing on 8 July 1913, 'Rusham Road: 6-7.15 a.m. one thrush hammering away at one triple cry, message or whatever anyone else likes' and on 1 February 1915, 'How I noticed the one thrush near the tip of poplar 250 yards beyond Nightingale Lane in opening of Rusham Road – he was singing, the only one'. This sentence was adapted for use as the second verse of his poem *The Thrush*.

As recorded in his *War Diary*, it was at Rusham Road that Edward had supper with all his brothers on 11 January 1917 and said goodbye to his elder daughter Bronwen and his mother and father the next day, before embarking for France on the 29th.

My last quotation is a passage from *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, where Edward gives an account of walking to Wimbledon Common with other boys and girls. In it he talks of the paper factory which was located on the the river Wandle where it runs parallel to Garratt Lane. The Royal Paper Mills was demolished in 1910 but a nearby road, Esparto Street, carries a reminder in its name, as esparto was a type of grass used in paper-making.

I know you will enjoy this mention of the Wandle because of the great interest your Society has taken in the restoration and management of the river, and perhaps even more the reference to a location with special relevance to where we are meeting tonight: 'The three-mile walk was ... good in itself, whether we went by Wandsworth, Earlsfield or Wimbledon ... Allfarthing Lane was worth going down for its name's sake. We invented explanations and repeated those of our parents. At the top dwelt an old woman in what looked a one-room hut who presumably knew and had something to do with the origin of the queer name. But above all, whichever way we we took, the Wandel had to be crossed ... best of all was the middle way through Earlsfield, crossing the Wandel at the paper mills. The smell of the mills wafted over a mile and a half on certain still evenings gave me a quiet sort of poetic delight. Hereby the water ran over a steep artificial slant, swift, glittering, and sounding; and sometimes we stayed here and caught minnows instead of going on to Wimbledon. It was the first place where I saw and realized the beauty of bright running water. We paddled with our stockings in our shoes and our shoes tied together and slung over our shoulders. We talked and laughed and shouted and splashed the water. I cannot remember cold or rain or any clouds there'.

I will now ask Anne to finish our talk by reading a small selection of Edward Thomas's poems, starting with one of his most popular, *Adlestrop*. By the way Anne has published a book, *Adlestrop Revisited*, about the wide response to the poem from readers and other writers over the years. *Adlestrop / Birds' Nests / March / Helen / Good-night*

Reviews

Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (Faber and Faber, 2011)

We see him there, in that famous picture, on the cover of Matthew Hollis' new work *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas*. Distant, pensive, he stares in sorrow or anger beyond the photo's borders. The expression on that weather-chiselled face asks us how much we understand him and dares us to admit: very little. This mysterious man, soaked in literature, hails us from a lost England that may never even have existed. That absent universe of colonial swagger, effortless English cultural hegemony, feverish arms races and a finickety Robert Bridges seems dead to us now, simultaneously mummified and shattered by the First World War. Edward Thomas often appears the only sane one among

his younger contemporaries. Brooke's proto-potent ironic insight strains beneath sentimental treacle; the self-consciously arty Imagists swagger above the common throng of poets casting arch glances at those who do not understand the undeniable appeal of manifestos; the rest of the Georgians hobble along amidst the perfumed countryside, panting with joy at sky and field and meadow; DH Lawrence still sweats away in the adolescent fumes of rhyme, fields and haymaking and TS Eliot is just a rumour old poetry critics use to scare their children. It is not until the war poets appear in their savage bitterness that English poetry jolts itself awake and finds the tools to express the shocking immediacy of being alive in a simultaneously beautiful but belligerent world. And amidst all this there is the nervous elegance of Edward Thomas. But how to know him? How to work out why he, almost alone, seems both connected to his environment and able to express that connection in the poise of poetry? Why does his unique voice, rooted in its time and yet somehow timeless, fixed on nature and the seasons and resigned to the melancholia of decay, appeal to us today in our post-ironic, urban world? It is easy to fear that we in our modernity have nothing in common with him except our species. And yet his poetry, close but distant, accommodating but alienating, gives us some comfort, some sense that we know the man. But for all the memoirs, the biographies, the impressions, the criticism, the letters, he remains a poet whose inner life stays misty. Not quite anything specific (Reviewer? Critic? Author? Poet? Soldier?), yet his poetry now an essential component of English literature, taught at A-Level and worshipped by poets from Ted Hughes to Philip Larkin, he haunts the literary dreamworld, unfixed and eternally brooding.

And this is where Matthew Hollis comes in. This work feels like an attempt to bring Edward Thomas to the contemporary reader. Hollis does not toe the line of traditional biography. This is not a pedantic shuffle through every detail of Thomas' life, from favourite food as a toddler to whether he may or may not have met so and so at such a place, but a taut and focussed account of his painful transition from struggling but respected prose mercenary to cool and determined verse artiste. The book is split into logical sections that trace Thomas' literary development, from Steep to Dymock, through High Beech to his swansong at Arras. Much is made of Thomas' long service as tireless critic and ceaseless reviewer. Various themes emerge such as cowardice, the literary double, the importance of roads and travelling, and Thomas' psychoanalysis sessions with Godwin Baynes. There is little spurious detail here. What is pertinent from Thomas' past Hollis drops in to the text via tightly-controlled vignettes such as the background to self-styled Super-Tramp, W.H. Davies. The reader never feels short-changed. Information we need is selected and deployed, such as Thomas' relationship with his father and his courtship of Helen and the overall picture of a mind darting between present and past is nuanced and impressively detailed. This unknowable poet begins to become less opaque as Hollis eases himself and the reader into the psychology of a man born to be a poet but who had not written verse for a decade before producing his astonishing corpus in such a short space of time.

It is clear that Hollis, a poet himself, is very interested in the nature of shared literary inspiration. Thomas' most influential guru, champion and agony uncle was of course Robert Frost who came to England frustrated by the apathy of America towards his work. Once on these shores he gained access to literary circles through which he met Thomas. The two hit it off and much of the second half of the book concerns their playful rivalry and the growth of a mutually beneficial support network. But it was not untarnished. Frost was keen on Thomas writing verse; Thomas less so. Thomas needed Frost as a friend; Frost blew more hot and cold. But what emerges from Hollis' analysis is not so much a record of direct inspiration of the more specific kind but more a subtle, indirect, hinted-at inspiration nourished on long talkative walks and shared belief. This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the shifts and nuances of the relationship between the two poets and shows how, without Frost, it is unlikely Thomas would have either felt that there was a literary culture to which he could belong, or that he himself was capable of turning his prose into poetry.

Moreover this exchange of thoughts and theories, walks and talks directly contributed to Thomas' belated and fatal decision to enlist. Hollis focuses on the infamous incident of Frost's and Thomas' contretemps with a Dymock gamekeeper and links this with Frost's 'The Road Not Taken' in a cogent and clear analysis. The upshot of the almost-scuffle was that Thomas spent the following months dragging around a mental landmine. Corroded by fears of being thought of as a coward by Frost and others and aware that Army life would solve further threatening financial trouble, he came to terms with the reasoning behind whatever patriotism meant for him, joined the Artists' Rifles and the rest is sadness. The author goes some way to teasing out the Byzantine thought process Thomas must have followed and produces a convincing picture of a mind at war with itself over the war outside.

The author's wide research is never in danger of translating into dry or stodgy prose. Thomas comes as alive as we could hope to find him. He seems modern, connected, ironic: a Modernist unaware of his Modernism. No ineffectual angel or Romantic waif, we see him here in all his flawed complexity. Comments and asides from the letters of many literary players of the time are deployed to season the impression of isolation we could derive of a man who spent much of his time alone writing ('a man with no vinegar in his veins', said Pound of Thomas). Trips to London for literary lunches with everyone from Conrad to Ford Madox Hueffer and of course readings at Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop formed a bustling pre-war life. Hollis develops an insightful and clear view of this patchwork literary climate with evocative passages on the atmosphere of the age and the eccentric, scattergun characters of the Georgian Poets. Even though Hollis himself occasionally seems shocked by Thomas' depression and dark moods, he never shirks the task of showing us the man in the round. His suicide dry run, fictionalised by Thomas in 'The Attempt', is not avoided or papered over but instead is described with great tact and restraint.

Hollis' main achievement is to write clearly and unsentimentally about such a labyrinthine character. This book refreshes and revitalises the poet, situating him clearly in a context but also suggesting why his poetry remains alive, conversational and true. Capable of inspiring great affection - he was the 'most admirable and loveable man we have ever known' said the Frosts - but someone who in his own admission 'hated crowds' and could be waspish and aloof, Thomas lingers justifiably in our national consciousness, a man never desirous of fame yet who now remains unswervingly permanent. Hollis brings us closer to him, but he still sits, stubborn, refusing conclusions. Unassuming himself, he assumes nothing of the readers that he never knew he would have. A paranoiac before postmodern paranoia was the norm, he retained his sensitive humanity in the face of a toxic existential fear his mind could only harbour and nurture. The tentative, questioning content of his poetics stands above its own time because it mirrors our contemporary struggle to infer meaning from implications that may offer nothing of the sort. But what he did not have for the majority of his life, and what we in contrast are fortunate enough to have, is his poetry. For this we can be thankful. Even if that was all that remained of him, what a sufficiency it would be, and fortunately, this new book does that satiety justice.

James Lowe

Now All Roads Lead to France has received many reviews in the press, and has won at least two prizes, including the Costa prize. Many congratulations to Matthew Hollis. 2011 was a good year for Edward Thomas.

Edward Thomas, *Autobiographies*, ed. Guy Cuthbertson (Oxford University Press, 2011).
Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition. Volume I.

Born and brought up in London to Welsh parents, no town or city can claim Edward Thomas as its own son (though the good people of the blue plaque squad have done their best to in Wandsworth) because although he spent his life predominantly in London, spiritually he was a man of the countryside.

In the same way, poetry cannot be asserted as Thomas' single, natural literary home despite 'poet' often preceding or succeeding his name. Thomas' output as a prose writer - a critic and a countryman - is often treated as 'hackwork' but even 'hackwork' is still, after all, his work, and much of the prose holds a value that must not be overlooked. And as a result of this publication, his prose cannot be neglected. Even the so-called 'hackwork' is the context to these autobiographical writings.

The first volume of *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition, Autobiographies* establishes Thomas' additional status as an autobiographical writer, a hybrid position, a porous mix of his natural lyrical talent and his descriptive precision, influenced by his time as a journalist. In the process, the first volume provides a solid introduction to the writer's origins, life and style, courtesy of Thomas himself.

Contained within the introductory volume of the series is *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* which was thought by the writer to be 'too dull and too intimate for publication.' Though Thomas as a child is certainly no *Child Called It*, and by his own admission the happiest moment of his childhood was the purchase of a new pigeon, 'possessing it thrilled me through and made me forget weather, time, meals, father and mother and native land,' there are, contained within his recollections, vividly described incidents which are harder to be so flippant about, such as the writers' 'soft-hearted' reaction to the killing of a bird. *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* is valuable because it is honest. Thomas does not fill in gaps in his memory with supposition so as to make the work compelling; he simply states that he cannot remember and his integrity is the hook.

The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans, which begins the volume, a work of 'half memory, half fancy', further reinforces Thomas' position as a writer who is able to create a single work of blended autobiography and fiction.

Autobiographies should be the first port of call for a student of Thomas or for a reader of his work seeking to enrich their understanding of the writer. The skilled typing of *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* should not be overlooked. I did it.

Sarah Stewart

Autobiographies and *Now All Roads Lead to France* were both chosen as 'Books of the Year' in *The Times Literary Supplement* in December 2011. A long review of both books, and *England and Wales*, appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 27 January 2012.

ETF member Ian Brinton reviewed *Autobiographies* for *The Use of English*. This is how his review begins:

In the introduction to this first volume of the Oxford selections from the prose of Edward Thomas the editor, Guy Cuthbertson, points us immediately to one of the central themes running throughout the work: the inability to ever go back; the inaccessibility of a past which haunts and beckons whilst always being one step away from actualization. The volume contains work which Thomas undertook over an eighteen month period prior to writing his first poems in December 1914 and it is notable for being prose fiction and autobiographical sketches which were not commissioned. There is a clear sense that Thomas wanted to write these pieces and by the time he began to heed the advice of Robert Frost, who was persuading him to write poems, he had emerged from what R. George Thomas has referred to as a period 'of intense self-examination with a clearer view of his own gifts as a journalist reporter' who had learned 'to forge for himself a style that was finely attuned to combine the velleities of his inner vision with a clearheaded perception of life around him'. That clear-headedness is evident in this remarkable collection of prose pieces some of which have never been published before and some of which have been for far too long only available within the confines of the antiquarian bookshop.

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Edward Thomas, *England and Wales*, ed. Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (Oxford University Press, October 2011). *Edward Thomas: Prose Writings: A Selected Edition. Volume II.*

When the Edward Thomas Fellowship was founded, it had a number of objectives, a major one being to encourage the reprinting of Edward Thomas's prose works, many of which had seen only one edition, and were difficult to find and expensive when found. Over the years there was a reasonable degree of success with individual works being reprinted by a miscellany of publishers. Useful though this was, it tended to be random, so the announcement a few years ago that OUP would be publishing a selected edition, working systematically through all the prose works, came as good news. Initially, there had been hope of a collected edition, but that would have been enormous and very expensive to produce. By contrast the 'Selected Edition' will consist of six uniform volumes: 1 *Autobiographies*; 2 *England and Wales*; 3 *Biographies*; 4 *Selected Writings on Poetry*; 5 *Critical Studies: Swinburne and Pater*; 6 *Pilgrimages*. Into these portmanteau headings, much of Thomas's prose will be fitted, sometimes by means of long extracts, sometimes by complete works. Each volume is introduced by a distinguished scholar in the field, including our Joint President, Edna Longley.

Volume 1 was published in the summer. Edited and introduced by Guy Cuthbertson, the introduction was fresh, stimulating and original. Volume 2, also edited by Guy but in conjunction with Lucy Newlyn had a lot to live up to. The first thing one notices is the formidable price (£85). Sadly, this is not at all unusual for such a book from a university press, but rather consigns it to library and university shelves. Conversely, to buy copies of the prose works included in this volume on the second-hand market, if one could find them, would cost much more, so the book can be seen as a reasonably inexpensive means to acquire much of Thomas's prose. It is also well printed and bound and 600 pages long- or 14

pence a page. Not long ago I saw a copy of *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* for £85.00. Seen in this light perhaps the price is not so daunting.

It cannot have been an easy task to divide the prose into six volumes. 'England and Wales'. One could argue that just about everything that Thomas wrote was about England and Wales, whether directly or in relation to himself. Those two countries were the staff of life to him. What the Editors have done is to put titles such as *In Pursuit of Spring* and *The Icknielld Way* into Volume 6, 'Pilgrimages', which gives a somewhat different emphasis to them. One can argue interminably about how the division and selection should be made, but this is serviceable and stresses the difference between a more straightforward 'country' book such as *The South Country* and those more personally complex such as *The Icknielld Way*, where Thomas's self analysis is stronger. Volume 2 includes in chronological order all or parts of *The Woodland Life*, *Horae Solitariae*, *Oxford*, *Beautiful Wales*, *Rest and Unrest*, *Rose Acre Papers*, *The Isle of Wight*, *Light and Twilight*, *The Country* and *Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds*. There are also essays from posthumous collections such as *The Last Sheaf* and *Cloud Castle*. I was particularly pleased that the introductions to *Rural Rides* and *Words and Places* were included. Thomas's introductions to others' books are easy to forget, but all of them tell us something of his judgment, sympathies, interests and distinction of thought. Being arranged chronologically, it is easy to discern the development of style and the range of topics that Thomas covered.

The Introduction starts, as did Thomas, with Richard Jefferies and England. Jefferies along with James Ashcroft Noble and David (Dad) Uzzell are singled out as being substitute fathers, even though one was already dead and one would die before the end of the century. Apart from spotlighting the gulf between him and his own father, this seems to me profoundly true. Noble is a more elusive man than the other two, largely because of his early death and the fact that he is hardly read these days. It is indeed difficult to find items by him, but as the Introduction notes, Thomas's loyalty and keenness to live up to Noble's expectations of him, affected his career and even to some degree the conduct of his marriage. One of the legacies from Noble was the way in which Thomas championed a subjective form of criticism: he moved away from a solely 'literary' response.

With so much space needed for the texts, the Introduction is on the short side, but is concentrated and covers a miscellany of topics from 'natural history', to 'historical context', to 'topography' to 'intertextuality', a particularly interesting section. It is distinguished by showing many of the principle themes in Thomas's life and work. It was pleasing too to see mentioned the names of writers liked, sometimes 'discovered' and championed by Thomas: Eleanor Hayden, for instance, writing at the same time as Thomas about the Berkshire Vale of the White Horse, an area familiar to him. She was a delightful personal and subjective writer, recording things as she saw them, which is probably what appealed to Thomas, while a weightier writer was George Bourne (or Sturt), who had a lasting appeal for him. His review of Bourne's work, *The Bettsworth Book* for instance, has a hint of envy as well as admiration about it. One feels that that was a book Thomas would have liked to write.

This is a lovely book for all lovers of Thomas's writing. To have so much in one volume actually helps in studying his works and the notes are impeccable. I have been searching them for something I could challenge, either as regards accuracy or opinion. I am still searching. Perhaps they are too full? Even in these post-classical days, I guess most people would know that *requiescat in pace* means 'rest in peace' but maybe not.

For the price of a meal for two in a London restaurant, here are lasting riches.

Richard Emeny
December 2011

Thomas's Literary Agent

Matthew Hollis has rightly been applauded for his fine *Now All Roads Lead to France*, published earlier this year. There is however a small point worth drawing attention to. The late Professor R. George Thomas in his writings suggests that Thomas's literary agent, C. F. Cazenove, died in action in 1915 and this point has been repeated by Hollis. In fact, according to his Death Certificate, Cazenove died on 4 January 1915 from 'intestinal obstruction 15 days' and 'enteritis 11 days'. His last letter to Thomas was on 17th December 1914, four days before he was taken fatally ill, aged forty-four.

I wrote to Professor Thomas about this some time before he died and Professor Thomas agreed that this had been the case and undertook to make a correction in a future edition of his book. Alas, this was not to be as he died soon afterwards. He had told me that the story about Cazenove's death came from the poet's family.

Cazenove was a partner with George Herbert Perris (1866-1920), a radical campaigner and journalist, in a literary agency called The Literary Agency of London, which had been founded by Perris in 1899. It seems that he met Cazenove around this time through a literary group known as the Cemented Bricks. By 1902 Cazenove was working with Perris as a partner, while continuing his work as a book exporter in a firm started by his father. Perris had known Thomas since at least 1900.

There is a full account of Thomas's relationship with the Literary Agency of London in 'Edward Thomas and his Literary Agent', which I wrote for Newsletter 37, in 1997.

Robert Gomme
December 2011

Some Notes on the John Moore Biography of Edward Thomas

The great success of Matthew Hollis's recent book about the final years of Edward Thomas's life and his conversion to writing poetry (*Now All Roads Lead to France*, Faber, ISBN 978-0-571-24598-7, £20.00) together with the knowledge that Jean Moorcroft Wilson is engaged in writing a biography of his whole life sent me back to the first biography published by Heinemann, which appeared in 1939 (if one discounts Eckert's elongated essay in his bibliography of Thomas: *Edward Thomas, A Biography and a Bibliography*.) Moore's book, *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas*, had the full co-operation of Helen, other members of the Thomas family and many of Thomas's friends. Its sales probably suffered from the outbreak of war. At the end it included a section of letters and extracts from letters written by Thomas, the first occasion on which so many to different people on disparate topics had been released. Despite its thoroughness the book was disliked by Helen and others, largely because they felt that it showed too dark a picture of the man; it was too easy, they believed, to dwell on the mental health problems, uncertainty about money and so on, ignoring the many happy and memorable occasions when Thomas was at his best and happiest. Whatever one's view of Moore's biography, he more or less set the menu of themes that successive writers have taken up: disagreements with his father, early marriage, depression, lack of funds, antipathy to being a hack writer, self effacement, difficulties in finding his

way to poetry and the influence of Robert Frost. To a greater or lesser degree everyone writing about Thomas's life, and most writing about his poetry, have covered these matters, placing varying degrees of importance on them.

Those themes were inherent in the relics, memories etc available. Moore, of course, came to his conclusions from the material he saw, the interviews he took and his own reading of Thomas, while many of those who disliked the book had in fact contributed to it. Eleanor Farjeon, for instance had lent Moore the correspondence between Thomas and her, which subsequently was donated to Battersea Library, where it remains. Having been sent the typescript, she complained to Moore in a letter dated 6th March 1936 that he had written a story about Thomas 'skimmed off the top of others' writings'. She felt it needed 'more depth and less surface.' Moore, she believed, had presented too much of the unhappy and neurasthenic side of Thomas, and not enough of the other side. She accused Moore of depending too much on 'Helen's books'. (*As It Was* and *World Without End*). Curiously, Helen disliked Moore's book for exactly the same reason, so presumably did not believe that too much attention had been paid to her own books. Eleanor sent a copy of her letter to Moore to Roland Watson, the Secretary of the Memorial Committee, that had planned and arranged for the stone to be placed on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. He concurred with her view.

Such trenchant criticism must have shocked and worried Moore, who subsequently sent a copy of the letter to Sir Ian McAlister, one of Thomas's closest friends since Oxford days, and someone who had helped him both financially and with advice. He replied on 10th March 1938, 'Please don't be disheartened about it all... After all Eleanor Farjeon is no special critic and of course a complete sentimentalist. And Watson never knew him or set eyes upon him, and he is quite fanatical about him. So I shouldn't worry about that either... Just cheer up and all will be well.' Moore then sent a copy of the typescript of the first part of the book to McAlister, who replied on 21st April 1938, 'I enclose 7 pages of scrappy notes. The more I read the more I like it and I don't care what anyone says. You have got him in a remarkable way.' Emboldened, Moore sent McAlister the second half and received the following comment dated 21st May 1939: 'I can't imagine anything better. To me it seems just perfect, the book I have always wanted to see written and now it is written. I cannot thank you enough.' Later he received a copy of the printed book and wrote to Moore, 'It is better-definitely better- than I hoped could be and I can't praise it more highly than that... the book I so much wanted to see... you give all the time the impression you knew him yourself.' The acknowledgments page of the biography includes the following: 'I am particularly indebted to Sir Ian McAlister for encouragement at many times when it was badly needed...' This probably refers to Moore's dismay at Eleanor Farjeon's comments.

If Eleanor Farjeon and Ian McAlister represent two opposite poles, others reacted in different ways either to the typescript sent to them for comment or to the published book. Sometimes their reactions were surprising: James Guthrie wrote to John Haines on 24th November 1937, noting that he had seen very little of the 'down side' of Thomas, but recalled him wearing a bowler hat when he went to London. J. M. Thorburn, a fellow officer in the RGA battery, and mentioned in the War Diary, wrote to Moore on 6th February 1946 asking for the precise year, month, day, time and place of Thomas's birth so he could cast his horoscope, a somewhat superfluous notion by 1946 I would have thought. Thorburn appeared a little put out that Moore had not included such details in the book. Unfortunately, I do not know what Moore's response was.

An early correspondent was E. S. P. Haynes, who in March 1936 declined to let Moore have any of the letters he had received from Thomas on the grounds that they were mainly business or about the secret marriage and disputes with Thomas's father. He recommended Moore to approach Lady Clarke Hall, who 'has some good letters.' These were not forthcoming. Haynes liked the book, writing to Moore on 30th August 1939, 'I read

most of the book this weekend and think very well of it. It is certainly very candid, especially as regards Edward's father.'

The other Haines, J. M., commented on 22nd February 1938 after reading Chapter 7 in typescript, 'I am glad you recognised the artistic side of Helen's books. I have always thought she wrote them largely to make good her claim to be an artist, and after all there is no reason why they should not have been romantic, as they were never published as other than fiction.' This is an interesting statement, as the early editions of the books, while being written in the first person, referred to David and Jenny, not Edward and Helen. I take the view that more recent editions in which the actual names are used do Helen a slight disservice in suggesting that the contents are all factual, whereas there are numerous fictions in the book, as Helen admitted in later years. Haines also stated that Thomas was every bit a Londoner 'with an Oxford covering.'

Haines also queried the anecdote of the cricket bat and W. H. Davies' wooden leg in a letter of 27th May 1939. 'I wonder about the incident of the wooden leg of W. H. Davies. The story, as I heard it, occurred when Davies and Thomas were walking together and Thomas took it to be repaired- when the blacksmith sent the bill 'To one fancy cudgel 6d,' and Dolly (Davies's wife) vows that Edward told her the story himself. I like this version better than yours anyway. I told both stories to Harry Hooton on Monday, but he said he had never heard of either.'

As a complete contrast, Irene McArthur, one of Helen's two sisters commented on 7th November 1937: 'It is strange to think that a life is now being written of that shy, sensitive, diffident and rather pimply youth who came to see my father about 42 years ago, whom none of us (except Helen) took to very much then.'

It seems clear that biographers cannot please all their readers all the time and that readers will see the subject matter differently, depending on their experience of and relationship with the biography's subject. What biographers write is obviously enough dictated by the source material available, although their own interests and a desire to increase sales can distort, so the resultant picture is not likely to be entirely accurate or to be appreciated by those who saw a different side of the subject. It will be a version of the subject. Does it matter if Thomas suffered from depression, or was it diabetes, as he came to suspect himself? Did his feelings for his father matter? All these certainly mattered to his family, but to the rest of us, they should perhaps only be relevant if they affected his writing. That, however, is almost impossible to judge. Samuel Beckett in a letter to Martha Fehsenfeld of 18th March 1985 gave her permission 'to edit my letters in the sense agreed on, i.e. its reduction to those passages only having bearing on my work.' Editor, family, publisher, executors have been arguing about what to publish ever since Beckett's death. Fortunately, Matthew Hollis's book seems to have met with general, if not universal, approval and it has won the Fisher Prize for the best first biography by an author. John Moore would have been pleased with that treatment.

I am indebted to the late R. George Thomas, who made some of the extracts used above available to me. Many come from a collection held by Rowland Watson, which he lent to George Thomas. The Watson family have recently passed many items of that collection to the Fellowship, which has placed them in its Archive at the University of Gloucestershire. Others come from the John Moore archive.

Richard Emeny
November 2011

Other News

Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, who contributed to *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (Enitharmon Press, 2007), will be reading with Simon Armitage, Carol Ann Duffy and Helen Dunmore at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on 21 March in a special event to celebrate the 45th anniversary of Enitharmon Press. Enitharmon's director, Stephen Stuart-Smith, has belonged to the Fellowship for many years and is a former committee member. A 'Friends of Enitharmon' scheme is to be launched at the time of the reading: for further details of this please visit www.enitharmon.co.uk, email: info@enitharmon.co.uk, or telephone 020 7482 5967.

In *The Daily Telegraph* on 1 November 2011, Michael Deacon wrote about the Beeching cuts:

What inspired the report's author, Dr Richard Beeching, to be so ruthless? It's not a view widely held by historians, but personally I blame Edward Thomas. [...] 'Yes, I remember Adlestrop,' sighs the poet, noting the station's unpeopled peacefulness [...] Imagine the impact it would have had on the young and impressionable mind of this budding philistine and bureaucrat. 'What's this? "No one left and no one came / On the bare platform"'? A station that no passengers use! What a waste of public money!'

The Arts and Crafts Movement in Steep and Petersfield (DVD). The cost of the DVD is £12.50 (+£1 p & p) via David Jeffery, 27 Woodbury Avenue, Petersfield. Hants, GU32 2ED or, to contact him, you can also ring 01730 263889 or email jeffery680@btinternet.com

Michael Morpurgo's choice in *A Good Read* on Radio 4 on 4 October 2011 was *Under Storm's Wing* by Helen Thomas.

Minnie Driver referred to her schooling at Bedales in 'Learner Driver', an article about her presentation of the Pearson Teaching Awards, in *The Radio Times* (29 Oct-4 Nov 2011): 'I still have the anthology of poets [her teacher Alastair Langlands] copied and bound together for us. Everything from Edward Thomas, the local poet, to Spike Milligan to Shakespeare. He said, "These are poems that you'll carry with you your whole life". And he was right'.

Jean Moorcroft Wilson took part in a discussion on *Today* (Radio 4, 10 November 2011) on unpublished poems she has found by Siegfried Sassoon, and the influence of the First World War poets on the way the conflict is perceived today. Jean's review of *Now All Roads Lead to France* by Matthew Hollis appeared in the Review section of the *Camden New Journal* (15 December 2011).

In the article 'A Landscape to Die For' in the *Radio Times* (19-25 Nov 2011) Owen Sheers wrote about his adaptation of his novel *Resistance* for a new feature film, and location filming in the Black Mountains: 'Landscapes have accents, unseen histories that are nonetheless felt, and the actors soon became attuned to those accents in the Llanthony,

Grwyne Fawr and Olchon valleys. The mists were home-grown, the stones of the houses true and the winds, well, to quote Edward Thomas, 'When the gods were young, this wind was old', an reference to the last line of *The Mountain Chapel*.

Mark Ford cites the influence of Edward Thomas ('like Spencer a profound self-doubter') on Bernard Spencer in 'The Analyst is Always Right', his review of the *Collected Poems of A S J Tessimond and Spencer's Complete Poetry* in *The London Review of Books* (17 Nov 2011): 'it is Spencer's sense of being at an oblique angle to the scene or characters he describes which most allies his poetry to that of Thomas, who time and again dramatised his inability to bite the day to its core'.

War Damage: Four Poets of the First World War by Richard Price, published in *Comparative Critical Studies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011) discusses the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, Wilfred Owen, Edward Thomas (particularly focussing on 'The Private') and David Bomberg.

The Poems of C. Day-Lewis read by Jill Balcon (Five Leaves) is a CD of seventeen poems by Day-Lewis. See www.fiveleaves.co.uk.

(with thanks to Richard Purver and other members for contributing to 'Other News')

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, email jbmonks@btinternet.com, 1 Colleton Hill, Exeter, Devon, EX2 4AS, Telephone 01392 493559. Cheques should be payable to The Edward Thomas Fellowship. Whole issues can also be provided.

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