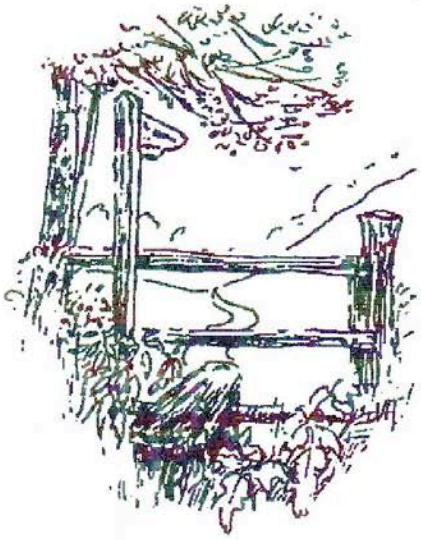
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 69 **January 2013**

The word Forest, with the help of romances, old legends, histories, and travellers' tales, is one of the most potent single words in the language; and Epping profits by it, and justly. It has the advantage also of other striking names. The Norman-French of Hainault and Theydon Bois, for example, incites us to garnish it with hunting splendours, many-coloured ceremonies and gallantries, and a most royal blowing of horns, neighing of horses, baying of hounds.

Contents

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Newsletter Editor: Guy Cuthbertson etfjournal@gmail.com Please send material for the next Newsletter as a Word document in an email attachment. Thank you. Please note that the gap between the appearance of the print version of the newsletter and its appearance on the web has been extended from six months to two years.

We are including the minutes, agenda and accounts in this newsletter because we need to get feedback from members. Also we need to get any thoughts or suggestions that members might 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.

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Anne Mallinson
1929-2013

Anne and her twin sister were born in India, their parents being in the colonial service. They were both sent home to be brought up in the United Kingdom by a niece of Kilvert who lived in the Cotswolds and who inspired Anne with her interest in the country and rural life. She joined the WRENS, and after this became the secretary of the Royal Ocean Yacht Club in London, here she met people like Francis Chichester with whom she corresponded until his death.

She decided to return to the country when she moved to Chawton in 1967 with the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of Jane Austen's death. Moving to Selborne she took the village post office, and worked as postmistress until changes in regulations (such as security screens) irritated her and she decided to change the shop into a bookshop specialising in books on rural subjects and especially the writers Flora Thompson, Jane Austen, George Sturt, William Cobbett, Gilbert White and Edward Thomas.
In the late sixties, walking her dog on the Shoulder of Mutton she met Major John Bowen, who in memory of Edward Thomas had walked from Steep to Selborne each March 3rd. Striking up a conversation, she continued to walk with him, collecting a small boy with his dog en route.

A little known fact of this time is the film she made at Chawton about Jane Austen.

She was invited to become a member of the committee to raise funds for the Memorial Lancet Windows designed and engraved by Lawrence Whistler, to commemorate the centenary of Edward's birth in All Saints Church Steep, along with Douglas Snelgar, Alan Martin, Jill Balcon and Alec Guinness.

Following the successful centenary weekend and dedication of the windows in 1978, Anne Mallinson, Harry Holmes, Alan Martin, Douglas Snelgar and Maj. General David Tyacke, with the approval and consent of Myfanwy Thomas, Edward Eastaway Thomas and Edward Cawston Thomas decided to form what was to become the Edward Thomas Fellowship and she was elected to be the first Chairman with Alan Martin as Secretary and Harry Holmes as Treasurer.

The Selborne Bookshop became a magnet for students of Edward Thomas; Anne would despatch a Selborne Bookshop Newsletter to interested people giving information on books and events associated with Flora Thompson, Jane Austen, George Sturt, William

Cobbett, Gilbert White and Edward Thomas. From these early newsletters the seeds of what was to become the Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter were sown. She mounted numerous events about her specialist authors in what was now known as the Selborne Bookshop, which finally went on to become known as The Mallinson Collection in Selborne.

The first Edward Thomas Newsletter was published in October 1980, edited by Anne and Alan Martin. This publication and articles in *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* were instrumental in helping to build up the Fellowship's membership and prestige and encouraged publishers to reprint works by Edward Thomas.

Anne arranged the launch of Professor R. George Thomas's biography of Edward Thomas at the Selborne Cottage Shop which was filled with an enormous collection of rural implements, many of which are now in rural life museums. It was from here that Anne ventured into a new phase of her life with the foundation of the Circle of Rural Writers. In 1988 she handed over the chairmanship of the Fellowship to the Revd. Douglas Snelgar who was the vicar of All Saints Church at Steep.

It is not unusual for members of the Fellowship to be acknowledged in new publications, and Anne's name can frequently be found in such related publications. However, she must be unique in the annals of the Fellowship to have a great deal of a chapter devoted to her, as she does in Ethel Manin's book *England my Adventure* in the chapter named 'Edward Thomas Country.'

Anne finally retired from the bookshop and museum in December 1995 when the lease expired and moved to Haywards Heath, having married Henry Hillwood on a sunny afternoon in Selborne Church supported by her many friends from Selborne and the Fellowship.

Her interest in the Edward Thomas Fellowship and other rural matters continued until a few months ago when her health began to seriously decline.

Anne's other passion was gardening, and in 2010 having entered a competition for 'Gardening Against the Odds', she was nominated for an award and the result of how she transformed her garden can be found at
http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk/cms/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Anne%20Mallinson.pdf

Anne was the proud recipient of the Silver Flag award from the magazine *This England* in February 1996 presented to her by Roy Faiers, the award celebrating spirit and enterprise to preserve or promote the English way of life was in honour of her country museum.

The inaugural event of The Edward Thomas Fellowship on the 25th September 1980 was a walk when the fifteen original members of the Fellowship walked from Wallingford to Blewbury, described in Edward's book *The Icknield Way*. From this small beginning the Fellowship has continually grown to over 350 members. At a time when interest in Edward Thomas is ever increasing, it is more than probable that some form of organisation would have been formed in Edward's name, but we who know and love the Fellowship will for ever be indebted to Anne for gently directing us on a path that has brought an insurmountable amount of joy into our lives.

Richard Emeny and Colin G. Thornton

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Anne Mallinson, a personal recollection

I first met Anne Mallinson in 1978 during the run up to the centennial birthday events for Edward Thomas at All Saints Church Steep. It was, as I recall only a brief conversation, but little did I know that moment, which began as the uneventful exchanging of our respective addresses was going to have such an enormous effect on the next thirty-five years of my life.

A month or so later a letter arrived with a heading that would become very familiar. It showed a picture of the Selborne Book Shop, and it was from here that Anne would despatch a newsletter giving news of events and books written by country writers such as Jane Austen, William Cobbett, George Sturt, Flora Thompson, Gilbert White and Edward Thomas.

The shop was to become the focal point for many of Anne's admirers and gradually it became a museum for rural artefacts as well as a bookshop. My work at that time brought me frequently into Hampshire, so it became the norm to telephone her and arrange a meeting. We spent many happy hours in the bar or restaurant of either the Queens Hotel or the Selborne Arms over the next twenty five years, proceeded by me browsing through her shop for books. She would disappear only to return with a book in her hand saying, 'You may find this interesting' as she made a presentation to me. She was correct, they were always interesting for she knew her regular customers preferences well.

With the formation of the Edward Thomas Fellowship, the heading on the letters changed to the familiar image that we see today, an image drawn for her by her friend Vicky Thomson. Those early newsletters brought information and gossip from many literary sources, and the village of Selborne became a 'second home' for members who would travel from all parts of the country for the Birthday Walk. For some of us who regularly would stay at The Queens, the sight of Anne scurrying down the road in sweater and wellingtons with a trug of flowers for the church her hair blowing in the wind became an annual vision as we consumed a leisurely breakfast.

Anne introduced new blood to the ETF committee of whom I was one, and she frequently offered me advice and background information to matters pertaining to the Fellowship, always given with kindness.

We spoke frequently of our friendship with Edward's daughter Myfanwy, and she delighted in visiting her at Bridge Cottage in Eastbury, and made a point of trying to be with Myfanwy on Remembrance Sunday.

I did not realize how many letters I had written to her until a conversation we had after assisting her to move into her new home in Ditchling. She showed me a file of my correspondence commencing with my first letter to her. I asked why it had pin-holes in the corner, to which she replied it was at one time pinned to the ceiling of her shop in Selborne, just one of hundreds she had received from all over the world.

Retirement brought me ever closer to Anne in as much that I could telephone her on a much more regular basis as well as our normal correspondence and visits. Always interested in the Fellowship's activities and its future plans, she would keep me apprised of the birds and changes in her garden in which she kept active until last autumn.

Anne's life touched many people and it was my great privilege to be part of that life. I will for ever be indebted to Anne for being my friend of thirty-five years. She brought an insurmountable amount of joy into my life for which I will always be grateful.

Colin G. Thornton

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Anne Mallinson 1929-2013

The first Saturday in March, 1973, was a pleasant, sunny day. During the morning The Selborne Bookshop had enjoyed several visitors, browsing among the books on the countryside and local writers. Just before lunch the door opened and two small boys entered, accompanied by a Petersfield poet called John Bowen. Between them they carried a pig's head, found on their walk, which was put on the counter, much to the delight of Digger, Anne's golden labrador.

"We've just walked from Steep", said John, "to celebrate Edward Thomas' birthday today."

It wasn't long before Anne was in full flow planning a birthday walk for the following year, with lunch at the White Horse and tea and readings in Steep Church for between ten and twenty walkers.

Gathering interested people round her – members of the Thomas family, Douglas Snelgar, Vicar of Steep - year by year the Walk grew, fuelled by Anne's energy, imagination and love.

And that was how The Edward Thomas Fellowship was born.

Anne was a family friend for nearly fifty years. We first met when she worked in my brother-in-law's antique shop in Chawton, next to Jane Austen's. Ian and I moved from Cheshire to Selborne and in 1971 I started as Anne's assistant in the Selborne bookshop she had opened in 1968.

During the next ten years I never ceased to be amazed and intrigued by Anne's imagination and inspiration, not only for her beloved bookshop, but for so many countryside writers, artists and craftsmen and women whose work was launched and exhibited in the bookshop or Selborne Village Hall.

I am not a writer and can barely scratch the surface in describing Anne's driving enthusiasm, her great kindnesses, and a whole book could be written about The Selborne Bookshop. Indeed Anne had hoped to start upon an autobiography. What a story she had to tell, but it was not to be. As another member of the Fellowship has said to me, "she has left a huge hole in my life."

Treasured friend, rest in peace.

Victoria Thomson

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The Birthday Walk, Sunday 3rd March 2013

The Walk: the Birthday Walk is the main annual gathering for Fellowship members. As in previous years, there will be two walks during the day, and members are welcome to join either or both walks. Both walks will start at the car park of Bedales School, Church Road, Steep, GU32 2DG, where parking and toilets will be available throughout the day.

Those coming on the morning walk should meet in the car park between 10:00 and 10:30 am. Walk sheets will be available on the day. The morning walk (a strenuous 4 ½ miles) will start at 10:30 am prompt, and will include a visit to the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. The afternoon walk will start at 2:30 pm from the car park at Bedales School and will be a more leisurely stroll of around 2 ½ miles.

Members of the Fellowship will read appropriate poems and prose during the walks and at the end of the lunch break.

Please wear suitable clothing and footwear (walking boots or wellingtons) for both walks. All those participating in the walks do so at their own risk.

We shall end the day at Steep Church around 4:00 pm, where tea will be available at a modest cost. This will be followed by the Fellowship's AGM and the Birthday Tribute, which will include selected readings from the works of Edward Thomas and associated writers.

For further information about the walk, please contact: Mike Cope, 9 Roffords, Goldsworth Park, Woking, Surrey, GU21 3BH ; tel: 01483 772913, or use the email below. The walk sheet will be available towards the end of February and anyone wishing to see one in advance should email: mike@copedr.freeserve.co.uk

Refreshments: for full details of lunch, please use the enclosed booking form.

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As usual we will be having supper at the Jolly Drover, Liss, near Petersfield on the evening of Saturday, 2nd March 2013. If anyone would like to be there would they please contact me so that I can make the necessary booking.

Hon. Secretary, Colin Thornton, colingthornton@btopenworld.com, Tel: 01983 853366 - Colin G. Thornton, 1, Carfax, Undercliff Drive, St. Lawrence, Isle of Wight, PO38 1XG

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The Extra Edward Thomas Walk – Saturday 8th September 2012

A select group of nine Fellowship members and Frosty the dog met at Steep on Saturday 8th September to enjoy a walk arranged by Stephen Turner. Having decided to step down from leading the Birthday walk after eleven years, Stephen was keen to organise a more informal but demanding walk at a more reliable time of year He hoped the walk would be very much in the spirit of a walk that Edward Thomas himself may well have taken. The weather was perfect and we started off with Sarah Bayliss reading "The Hollow Wood" and climbed Wheatham Hill by a circuitous route. At Cobbett's View we had a rest and listened to Peter Harris reading "The Lane" whilst enjoying an uninterrupted view over Hawkley and the surrounding countryside. Joining the Hanger's way we pressed on to the Hawkley Inn for a much anticipated lunch washed down with local ales and cider. Our group caught the attention of another visitor who was very interested in Edward Thomas and hopefully will become a Fellowship member.

Having endured plenty of stinging nettles thus far, we started off again with Terry Lloyd reading "Tall Nettles". We tackled the steep demanding climb up Happersnapper Hanger and on to the memorial stone on Shoulder of Mutton Hill. On the return back to Steep we stopped by the old mill to hear Larry Skillman reading "The Mill-Water". On arriving back at Steep there was some discussion about not being able to enjoy a Birthday Walk tea at Steep Church., however, Pam and Stephen had a surprise in store: elderflower cordial and homemade biscuits served from the cool box in the boot of their car. It was very much agreed that a similar event be organised in future years.

Anyone who would be interested in a similar walk in August/September 2013 should contact Stephen (01252 810852 or stephenjturner1@aol.com) to register an interest and to be kept informed of future such walks.

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Autumn Event 2012 Report

On the morning of Saturday 29th September 2012 in bright, sunny and warm early autumn weather, 20 Fellowship members and a few of their friends assembled outside Russell Square underground station for a walk visiting a number of the sites covered in the early chapters of 'Now all roads lead to France, the last years of Edward Thomas' by Matthew Hollis (published by Faber and Faber 2011).

The first stop was at Boswell Street at its junction with Gage Street. Boswell Street, formerly Devonshire Street, was the location at number 35 of the Poetry Bookshop opened by Harold Monro in 1913. There is no trace of this building now as it was destroyed by enemy bombing in the Second World War. The bombed areas have been redeveloped. However with the help of Kelly's GPO trade directory for 1911 and the bomb damage maps compiled by the London County Council at the end of that war, it had been possible to identify the physical location of the Poetry Bookshop which is now occupied by a restaurant. (These sources were provided by the London Metropolitan Archives). By using these same sources, number 20 where Wilfred Own lodged for a period was also identified. This site was approximately opposite number 35 and again was destroyed by bombing. It is occupied now by a newsagents/coffee shop. The group had time to explore the sites, take their own photographs and assemble in the relative quiet of Gage Street to listen to two readings by Breeda and Ian Morton. The first from 'Harold Monro & the Poetry Bookshop' by Joy Grant University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California © Joy Grant 1967 pages 115 and 116 and the second from the introduction to 'Harold Monro: Poet of the New Age' by Dominic Hibberd published by Palgrave Macmillan 2001.

The walk then proceeded to Brunswick Square where, under the shade of a fine London plane tree, Jean Moorcroft-Wilson read the sonnet 'That girl's clear eyes' from 'Edward Thomas, the annoted collected poems' edited by Edna Longley. Jean read first the commentary on page 310 which set the poem into context and also identifies this London plane tree as the spot where Edward Thomas may have taken shelter one day. Jean also provide an excellent description of the development of Brunswick Square and its links with Virginia Woolf.

The group then took the short walk to Handel Street to look at the outside of the drill hall where Edward Thomas learned drill and Royal Artillery training.

The final stop of the morning was at the Euston Road end of Dukes Road where Edward Thomas reported on 19th July 1915 to be attested Private 4229 in the 28th Battalion, The London Regiment (Artist Rifles). The building survived the bombing (the building to the left of it being totally destroyed) and is now used as a dance studios. The regimental crest is still over the doorway. Stephen Turner read 'This is no case of petty right and wrong'.

The Group then dispersed for lunch and re-assembled in the afternoon at the west door of Westminster Abbey for a service of commemoration. The service was held in Poets' Corner and was to remember Edward Cawston Thomas our late Chairman and to mark the forthcoming centenary of the publication of 'In Pursuit of Spring'. The staff of the Abbey had roped off Poets' Corner for the group's sole use while the short commemoration service was held. It was excellently conducted by Canon Tremlett. The service included readings of 'For these' by Larry Skillman, 'Lights out' by Colin Thornton and and an extract from 'Roads' starting at .....,'now all roads lead to France' by Richard Emeny. The service concluded with a wreath laying by Richard Emeny on the stone comemorating Edward Thomas along with the other First World War Poets. The wreath was made from ivy, old man, old man's beard, lavender and rosemary.

After the ceremony, the day was concluded in a traditional Fellowship way ,by repairing to a local hostelry for a pint, conversation and reflection on how the day went.

Current view of site of Poetry Bookshop in Boswell Street (formerly Devonshire Street)

Houses in Old Gloucester Street (formerly Gloucester Street). These were undamaged by bombing so are a good representation of how 35 Devonshire Street would have looked

Current view of Handel Street drill hall and school

Dukes Street enlistment centre

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Richard Emeny's talk to the Friends of the Dymock Poets, 6th October, Colwall Village Hall.

Richard began by quoting Jack Haines, the Gloucestershire solicitor - botanist, who described Edward Thomas as 'a Londoner with an Oxford covering.' Our sense from Thomas' writing is that he rejected London and the Londoner identity, but it was not so simple.

The London of his childhood was the world's largest city, heart of a huge empire, noisy, smelly and very diverse, being packed with Scots and Irish and indeed Welsh.
All of this, Richard said, Thomas ignored, as he did the poor. He wrote subjectively of those aspects of London that concerned him. His focus was on the suburbs, where of course his readership lived, an ever-spreading encroachment of villas into the fields around. His people, when they appear, are lower middle-class clerks, down-trodden in the main, a fate he was determined to escape.

His prose works often begin by a leaving of London. It was his questioning that led him to the country, where he believed lives were more honest and useful. But Richard pointed out the contradictions in his position, contradictions I am sure he must have been aware of. It concerns sentimentalism as we nowadays understand the term (not as in the past.) Thomas complained of being 'up to the neck in the country' in his reviewing of country books by 'men, women and others' who used the country in every possible way - 'as cash and as pills' was a phrase I remember. Wonderful and still relevant today.

Yet he of course was not a countryman, had never been, and vegetable growing at Yew Tree Cottage does not really count. Richard contrasted this with Jefferies, a farmer's son who knew the reality of back-breaking rural toil.

Of course, Thomas came to distrust his purely aesthetic appreciation of the country – so much so that it helped to impel him into enlisting.

Richard was not suggesting that Thomas was sentimental, but that his view was very personal and restricted. My feeling is that he was ultimately as much focused on the 'other inhabitants of earth' and their everlastingness. He was never sentimental about them but saw them acutely and as they were.

Richard continued by considering Thomas's sense of himself as 'a superfluous man' belonging nowhere. He rejected London and its values but depended on it for work and friendship – all those tea-shop meetings.

He rejected his father's positivism and belief in progress more profoundly, questioning everything against his own experience and where he was in the world, always with that sense , so prevalent in English literature that he – or maybe we – had 'lost the key.'

Richard ended by thinking about the war and Thomas's apparent lack of surprise in his war Diary: it was as if he knew already the industrial world's giant war machine that was turning 'young men to dung.' In one sense he had known, and as Richard concluded, one aspect of his poetry was a plea, quietly spoken, to live a less destructive life.

I had come expecting something about Edward's childhood and adolescence spent on Wandsworth Common and the house at Balham perhaps – I really ought to have known better. Being Richard, this was a profound exploration of the endless complexity that is Edward Thomas.

Margaret Thompson

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Edward and Helen Thomas in Battersea and Wandsworth

a walk on 28 May 2012 – part of a series of Wandsworth Heritage Festival events

On a sun-baked Monday at 2.30pm, in equatorial South West London, Richard Purver, with noble (no pun intended) assistance from Anne Harvey, led a 3 hour walk visiting both the homes where Edward and Helen had lived, and other places with which they had important connections.

21 intrepid devotees, many members of the Wandsworth Society (who organised the walk), mostly sporting protective sunhats and carrying the obligatory bottle of water, plus a plucky little dog called Hetty, convened at Battersea Arts Centre in Lavender Hill, which had formerly been Battersea Town Hall, at the start of a most interesting talk and walk led by Richard. Anne provided additional information, and also captivatingly read one or more of Edward's poems or prose at each location.

Of course, the homes where Edward lived, and the other houses we were to visit, did not fall in a convenient straight line or in a perfect circle; so, understandably, the chosen route took in places in an order which was geographically efficient, rather than chronologically accurate!

In the vestibule of what had been Battersea Town Hall, Richard mentioned that Edward's father had been interested in philosophy and politics, and had stood, unsuccessfully, as a local Liberal candidate in Battersea. He walked regularly across St James's Park with Lloyd George – who also lived in Wandsworth (although Battersea was a distinct borough from Wandsworth in those days). Anne read two very appropriate poems, "Battersea" and "Lavender Hill" from *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* by Edward's friend Eleanor Farjeon.

We then walked through a street of handsome Victorian terrace houses – of which there are so many in London – to Clapham Common North Side, better known to motorists

as "The South Circular". Here, Richard pointed out a magnificent house where John Burns a statesman and a (radical) Liberal politician had lived; in Edward Thomas's autobiography, Edward recalls being bowled out at cricket by John Burns on Clapham Common. Close by lived Charles Barry, the architect who designed the Houses of Parliament; another neighbour was Edvard Grieg. In fact, many famous people have lived along Clapham Common North Side and nearby; there is a positive epidemic of LCC and English Heritage blue plaques in the area!

Edward Thomas was born in Lansdowne Gardens, South Lambeth, near Stockwell, in March 1878. When he was 2, his parents moved to 49 Wakehurst Road (originally called 2 Tremorvah Villa[s] as Richard had recently discovered from the 1881 Census and other documents), at which several of Edward's brothers were born. When Edward was about 10, the family moved to 61 Shelgate Road, which was our next port of call. This large house, with very small front garden, and many-windowed attic, sports a plaque stating that Edward Thomas, Essayist and Poet, 1878-1917, lived here. Helen and Edward's first child, Merfyn, was born in this house in 1900, and Anne read Helen's very vivid description of the room in which he was born, no doubt with emotions and sensibilities heightened by her pregnancy, followed by Edward's poem about a similar place, "The Long Small Room". Helen became a writer in her own right; two books about her life with Edward (*As It Was* and *World Without End*) and children's stories, although she never composed any poetry.

We then processed to Belleville Road, to an archetypal Victorian London primary school, Belleville School, built in the mid-1870s on a fairly steep hill. Edward attended this school, then the local Board School. He later recalled "crawling in (to school) and bursting out" – a feature perhaps common to all children, as we witnessed by the eruption of a multitude of energetic children from the school in mid-afternoon, ready to be collected by mums, dads, and grandparents!

By prior arrangement, we were able to visit the school, view a typical classroom and the assembly hall, and be able to imagine it as Edward had known it. Although very colourfully decorated, and with the children's pictures on the walls and along the corridors, and the inevitable presence of modern technical equipment, the original structure of the building had evidently not been changed since it was built, so that it was not too great a leap of imagination. Edward remembered his school as having lofty rooms and large windows – and smelling of carbolic soap! He progressed to the main school from the Infants here in 1886, when he was recorded as Edwy, his pet name.

After being shown round the school by two members of staff, Baki Gashi and Alexandra Turnbull, deputy head Sarah Atherton told us about the recent journey by 15 Year 5 Belleville pupils to Steep in Hampshire, where they visited sites associated with Edward Thomas and met pupils from Steep Primary School. A report of the visit is carried on the school's website.

We went on to look at 49 Wakehurst Road, where Edward's world consisted of home, school, and the streets neighbouring the common (Wandsworth Common) where he would engage in mock battles, and take an increasing interest in wildlife and nature, while playing in and around the ponds and gravel pits. He visited blacksmiths and pigeon fanciers, and began keeping pigeons and white mice. He subsequently went on to attend Battersea Grammar School (and then St Paul's School, before going up to Oxford).

We then walked onto Wandsworth Common by Bolingbroke Grove and set off across the common in the sun, glad at the beginning to experience some shade of the trees. On 13 April 1895, when Edward was 17, he recorded that swallows, house martins and sand martins came to Wandsworth Common; his early work consisted in what we might term nature notes or natural history jottings, rather than poetry and inspired him to write his first book, *The Woodland Life*. It was later that he used similar material to compose two poems, which Anne then read: *How at once?* [*The Swifts*] and *Birds' Nests*.

We continued across the common, reaching the footbridge going over what must have been in Edward's day the line of "The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway", and crossed the common on the other side of the line to reach 6 Patten Road where Helen Noble had lived with her parents (they had previously lived in St Ann's Hill). Helen's father was the writer and critic James Ashcroft Noble, and Edward met her through both families attending the Unitarian chapel in East Hill (no longer standing). Helen had been born in Liverpool in 1877, and the family returned to Wandsworth in 1893 after a previous stay, Helen attending Wimbledon High School. Helen and Edward took long walks to Merton and Wimbledon, as part of their courtship. Anne read Helen's description of first meeting Edward and his later poem for her: *And You, Helen*.

We then passed some two blocks of fine large houses to view the home at 3 Routh Road where David Lloyd George, former Liberal Prime Minister had lived. As mentioned, Lloyd George knew Edward's father through local politics, although, of course, Lloyd George was much more successful as a politician.

A further pleasant walk across another part of the common towards Wandsworth Common station provided an opportunity to hear another of Edward's poems. Anne read "Adlestrop" on a patch of green near the station, from which it is possible that Edward and Helen set off on the railway journey which produced arguably the best-loved of all his poems. Interestingly, although the poem has a profound sense of solitariness, Helen was with him when he experienced arriving at Adlestrop station.

Crossing the railway line again, near Nightingale Lane, we found 12 Rusham Road, a tall, handsome, well-built house surrounded by a garden of trees. Edward's parents moved here, from Shelgate Road, in 1902, and Edward and Helen and their children regularly used to travel up from Steep to visit them, despite Edward's preference for the country. (Edward's father was to die in this house in 1920, three years after Edward's death at Arras in April 1917.)

Earlier, though, in 1913, Edward wrote a travelogue of a bicycle journey from London to the West Country, *In Pursuit of Spring*. He started out from Rusham Road on 21 March 1913 and his route was followed on the 80th anniversary in a charity cycle ride by Mary Wynn-Jones. Anne had been in the party seeing her off and read for us the same passage from the book as she had that day in 1993.

Edward had been writing mostly prose, essays and nature notes, but his friendship with Robert Frost (who visited Edward here) proved decisive in encouraging Edward to write poetry. It was at Rusham Road that Edward said goodbye to his family before embarking for France on 29 January 1917. Anne spoke Eleanor Farjeon's elegiac poem for Edward Thomas, "Easter Monday" – and it was a much appreciated conclusion to an excellent afternoon, demonstrated by a spontaneous round of applause for Richard and Anne, much to the astonishment of some passers-by!

(with thanks to both Richard and Anne for some corrections)

John Haskey
(member of both The Wandsworth Society - and also of The Edward Thomas Fellowship)
June 2012

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Dominic Hibberd

The Fellowship was much saddened to hear of the death of Dr Dominic Hibberd who died on the 12th August 2012 at his home in Kingham after a long illness. Dominic spoke at the Fellowship's study days and was frequently to be found at other events organized by the Fellowship.

Born in 1941 and brought up in Guildford, he was educated at Rugby School and King's College, Cambridge. He taught at Manchester Grammar School and at various universities in Great Britain, China and the United States, before finally moving to Oxfordshire to continue with a career in full time writing.

Dominic's name will always be associated with the war poet Wilfred Owen, culminating in what is widely regarded as the definitive biography, *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002). The biography represents the culmination of Dominic's scholarly research on Owen over many years.

It was while he was researching for the book *Wilfred Owen: The Last Year 1917 - 1918* that he discovered the Maison Forestiere, and uncovered its true significance. The house was empty and semi-dilapidated and it must have looked very much as it did in 1918. It was in that dark, smoky, humid cellar of the forester's house that Lieutenant Wilfred Owen penned his last letter to his mother, on the 3rd November 1918.

He was the author of numerous articles and reviews. His final work *The Winter of the World* (edited with John Onions, 2007), a collection of World War One poetry, eliminates many of the urban myths associated with World War One poetry.

Dominic was the Hon. Vice President of the Wilfred Owen Association and was a Hon. Fellow of the War Poets Association. In 2002 he was elected a F.R.S.L.

In 2010 Dominic was diagnosed with a rare neurodegenerative disease. Last year, when he was already very ill, he received a Doctor of Letters from Cambridge University.

He was cared for until the end by Tom Coulthard his close friend of thirty years.

Dominic was a gentle, quiet and courteous man, who accepted his illness with great courage. In accordance with Dominic's wishes, there was no funeral but a private cremation took place.

His books include *Wilfred Owen: War Poems and Others* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973); *Poetry of the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1981); *Owen the Poet* (London: Macmillan, 1986); *Poetry of the Great War: An Anthology*, edited with John Onions (London: Macmillan, 1986); *Diary of a Dead Officer: Being the Posthumous Papers of Arthur Graeme West* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1991); *Wilfred Owen: The Last Year 1917-1918* (London: Constable, 1992); *Harold Monro: Poet of the New Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); *Wilfred Owen: A New Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2002); *Strange Meeting: Poems by Harold Monro* (Holt: Laurel Books, 2003); *The Winter of the World: Poems of the First World War*, edited with John Onions (London: Constable & Robinson, 2007).

Colin G. Thornton
Hon. Secretary

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Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, and the Gamekeeper Incident

by Jeff Cooper

Around September 1st, 1914, a month after war had been declared, Robert Frost and his family moved about four miles from their cottage, Little Iddens in Leadington, Gloucestershire, into their friends' the Abercrombies' house, The Gallows in Ryton near Dymock. While they were there, Edward Thomas, the prolific writer (not a poet until December of that year) visited them a number of times. Up until Matthew Hollis's book *Now All Roads Lead to France* (2011) the fact that Thomas had been involved in an incident involving a local gamekeeper had hardly been noticed.[1]

There's nothing like a good story, and Robert Frost knew how to tell one. Immediately after the incident with the gamekeeper, he gave his own version in his own style and from his own point of view. He told it many times throughout his life, often changing and embellishing it. According to Lawrance Thompson, who got the story from Frost himself, the story 'was one of his favorites.'[2] But who was the gamekeeper, where did the incident take place, and what actually happened? Taking Thompson as the first definitive version of story as it's come down to us, we find that

> The incident occurred as the two men were returning from a long and aimless walk around the neighbouring parts of Lord Beauchamp's estate. As they came out of the woods on a narrow lane, they saw and passed by the hated gamekeeper, who held his shotgun threateningly. Thomas was frightened and Frost was furious. As they walked on, he tried to give the background of this tension, but Thomas would have none of it; there was no satisfactory explanation for the gamekeeper's performance, and something should be done. Inflamed by Thomas's words, Frost was caught up in one of his glowing rages. Something would be done right now, he said, and Thomas could come back with him to see it done. They did not find the gamekeeper until they had tracked him to his cottage, where Frost gave him a piece of his mind. If ever he acted like that again Frost would beat the daylight out of him. The gamekeeper blustered, and Frost repeated his threat as he withdrew.
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> That evening, the town constable knocked at the door of The Gallows. He said that he had been sent with orders to arrest Frost, but that he had no intention of

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[1] It's intriguing that, having checked six biographical works on Edward Thomas, from Robert Eckert's in 1937 to Matthew Hollis's in 2011, there is no mention of the incident at all until Matthew Hollis's book, *Now All Roads Lead to France* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011). Having checked six biographies of Robert Frost, all of them mention the incident. Taken chronologically, the biographies that I have consulted are Frost's *Selected Letters* (London: Cape, 1965 [1964 in the USA]), Lawrance Thompson's *Robert Frost: the Early Years 1874-1915* (London: Cape, 1967 [1966 in the USA]), John Evangelist Walsh's *Into My Own: The English Years of Robert Frost 1912-1915* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1988), Lesley Lee Francis's *The Frost Family's Adventure in Poetry: Sheer Morning Gladness at the Brim* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), Jeffrey Meyers's *Robert Frost: A Biography* London: Constable, 1996), and Jay Parini's *Robert Frost: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1998).

[2] Thompson, 1967, op cit., p. 603. Frost was so obsessed with the incident that when his friend and teaching colleague George R. Elliott came to England in 1921, Frost wrote and asked his friend the Gloucester solicitor Jack Haines to show him Gloucester cathedral 'and perhaps Ryton and a game-keeper' (letter in Gloucestershire Archives dated 20 January 1921). It's interesting to note that Edward Thomas treated the incident as a very minor affair, and didn't even make a note about it in his diary (now at the Berg Collection in New York Public Library).

> doing so. He was amused by Frost's threat and described the gamekeeper as a known bully. It would be necessary, however, to make a report to Lord Beauchamp concerning the incident, and he hoped that Frost wouldn't mind. A few days later Frost received a note of apology from Lord Beauchamp. Later, he learned from the constable that Beauchamp had called the gamekeeper on the carpet and told him that if he wanted so much to fight he had better enlist.[3]

There are other references in Thompson's biography, one where the gamekeeper, 'with shotgun in hand', intercepts children who had been blackberry and mushroom picking, throwing the contents of the baskets on the ground and trampling on them. He seemed like a thoroughly nasty person.

John Evangelist Walsh made the next important contribution,[4] and goes into some detail, giving the name of the gamekeeper as Bott, who was 'stern', strictly enforcing the rules, and 'customarily carrying a shotgun' which he waved threateningly at trespassers. He states that because Lascelles Abercrombie and Wilfrid Gibson rented property from the Beauchamp estate, they had permission to wander over estate land. Frost, living at that time in Abercrombie's house, thought he also had permission, but that unaccompanied children were prohibited from entering the estate. He goes on to say that the Ryton policeman, who called the following morning because of the insults Frost had thrown at the gamekeeper, gave Frost a summons. Much of the evidence used came from some notes taken by Robert Newdick from an interview with Frost in July 1936, 22 years after the event.

Six years after Walsh's account Lesley Lee Francis deals with the incident in her book.[5] She states that Bott was Lord Beauchamp's head gamekeeper, "a bully by reputation" who threatened adults and children with a shotgun, and he had called Frost "'a damned cottager,' in keeping with the class system of the day." When Frost turned to Wilfrid Gibson for support, he declined to assist, which made Frost accuse Gibson of 'social snobbery'. Jeffrey Meyers and Jay Parini simply repeat the previous accounts.[6] However, this cumulation of 'facts' hid the true story, and it is the purpose of this article to try and uncover the facts surrounding the incident.

What seems particularly interesting is the American slant placed on the story, trying to understand Frost's attitude and behaviour by talking about social snobbery and the English class system, but with misunderstandings and a complete ignorance and disregard of the law of property, sporting rights and gamekeeping. To illustrate this point, in a version published in 1931 by Raymond Holden he says, "A well known English Poet [he names Lascelles Abercrombie but means Wilfrid Gibson], who had helped Frost a great deal in the process of settling in the [Gloucestershire] country, would not come to his aid when a large landholder had Frost up for walking through a game preserve with his children, a kind of trespassing which is unknown in America. The American poet had thus felt the sting of being a trespasser on feudal lands; he had seen his children exposed to the insults of gamekeepers, the vulgarities of a society that has too many and too definite layers in it."[7]

Closer examination of all the accounts throws up a number of questions. Firstly, we need to look at some of the people involved. Earl Beauchamp was probably not directly concerned with the incident. It seems to have occurred on his land, but it had been leased to George Albright. George Stacey Albright was a successful chemical manufacturer from Birmingham (not a farmer, as previously thought), a manufacturer of phosphorous for matches. He was 59 years old in 1914, and had leased Bromsberrow Place in Bromsberrow near Ledbury from Frank Ricardo (1887-1929) since 1904, where he lived with his wife, son

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[3] Ibid., pp. 467-8.
[4] Walsh, 1988, op cit., pp. 200-204.
[5] Francis, 1994, op cit., pp. 154-58.
[6] Meyers, 1996, op cit., pp. 122-3; Parini, 1998, op. cit., p. 155.
[7] *New Yorker*, 6 June 1931, p. 24, quoted in Thompson, p. 603.

and 9 servants.[8] There was a large estate of approximately 2,000 acres associated with the house, properly referred to as the Bromsberrow Place Estate, ranging from the south end of the Malvern Hills known as Ragged Stone Hill (south of what is now the A438) in the north, to about half a mile beneath what is now the M50 motorway in the south, and including the villages of Bromsberrow and Bromsberrow Heath. Within the estate, and in parts of the adjoining Madresfield estate of Earl Beauchamp, Albright also leased separately a number of wooded areas for breeding game. He hired gamekeepers to look after the woods, the head gamekeeper for the area around the estate in 1914 being Fred Vessey.[9]

The gamekeeper has always been named in previous references as simply Bott or Ol' Bott. If this was his name, he is a bit of a mystery. As we have seen, he was someone who was apparently well known in the area (but not from the area),[10] with a reputation for dealing aggressively with trespassers. The 1911 census and other documents have no mention of such a person living in the area from the three counties of Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, all of which adjoin at around this point. However, there are a couple of remote possibilities. It's conceivable that he came to the area shortly before 1914, so he may have been John Bott, a farmer from Breinton in Herefordshire, who would have been 53 at the time of the incident; or if he came from further afield it could have been George Bott, a gamekeeper who would have been 40 years old and came from Cheshire. There are others that could have come from various parts of the country. It is all speculation. There are other possible explanations: that he treated the 1911 census in the cavalier way that lives up to his reputation, and didn't fill in the form (so risking prosecution), or Bott is a nickname – not unusual in the countryside – and that it refers either to the botfly or its larva,[11] or to the local term 'Ol' bott' or 'Ol' butt' meaning friend or mate (which doesn't seem to correspond with what we have heard of the gamekeeper's personality), or, most likely, that he has been wrongly recorded in the books that mention the incident. If there was a Mr. Bott he would certainly have been responsible to the head gamekeeper, Fred Vessey.

We know that Fred Vessey was George Albright's head gamekeeper, from a report of Upton-on-Seven petty sessions of December 1914. He was trying to prosecute a Charles Bunn of Redmarley for carrying a gun without a license and for 'obtaining game unlawfully' in 'Mr. Albright's wood'.[12] We also know that Fred Vessey was living in a cottage on 'Cobb Hills' (now known as Cobhill Rough), owned by Earl Beauchamp, in August 1910, where he is mentioned in a list of land values, and in April 1911 when the census was taken.[13] Cobhill Rough at this time was a small strip of woodland, about a sixth of the size it is today, known as Grove Copse or Coppice. The cottage was on the edge of Grove Copse. However, in the same book of land values, as a later addition, it states that 'Mr. Albright's keeper', not named, lived in 'Keeper's Cottage & Garden by Redhill Wood', also owned by Earl Beauchamp. Redhill Wood itself is on a steep hillside where it would be difficult to build a house (there's certainly no sign of one now).[14] The census for 1911 does not identify any

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[8] It remained in the Ricardo family until 1929 when most of it was sold off, and George Albright purchased the house and estate. The Albrights owned Bromsberrow Place until the early-1990s, when it was purchased by Dr. Gilbert Greenall

[9] There was another important gamekeeper employed by Albright at this time. He lived at Pauntley, just south of Ryton where the incident probably took place. His name was Alvin Allsopp. He had been brought up in the area, and was originally a gamekeeper for A.A. Stokes before becoming one of Albright's gamekeepers after 1904. He probably had no involvement in this incident.

[10] Thomas, op cit., p. 459, quoting notes sent to him by Catherine Abercrombie.

[11] A bott is actually the larva of the botfly.

[12] *Ledbury Guardian*, 19 December 1914, p. 2.

[13] *Duties and Land Values ... Redmarley and Staunton*. MS record book, 1910, p. 23 (Glos. Archives, D2428/1/47); Census 1911 lists Fred Vessey, his wife Rose, and his children Ann (aged 5) and Norman (aged 1) at Cobb Hills, Redmarley (the only residents at Cobb Hills).

[14] Ibid., p. 60. Redhill Wood is now reduced to about a third in size since 1914.

cottage on Redhill (or Red Hill), except Red Hill Farm, which is some distance from Redhill Wood. So alternatively, the cottage on Cobb Hills is the same cottage as the one 'by Redhill Wood', as both areas are in very close proximity (with a minor road, now a bridle way, running between the two).[15] I therefore suggest that Fred Vessey, Albright's head gamekeeper, is the proper name for Bott, living in the cottage at Cobb Hills, by Redhill Wood.

Fred Vessey was a gamekeeper with four years experience when he was employed by Albright. He had been brought up in Fillingham, Lincolnshire where his father had been a shepherd, but they had lived next to the estate's gamekeepers. It is probable that to be a gamekeeper one was expected to be 21 years old, but whatever the reason, Vessey falsified his age when he was 18, and obtained his first gamekeeping job near Upton in Lincolnshire in about 1900. He married an Essex girl in 1904, moving to Gloucestershire where he obtained the job with Albright, presumably shortly after Albright had started leasing Bromsberrow Place. By the time the incident took place, he was saying he was 35 years old, whereas he was actually 32, living with his wife and two children, aged 8 and 4.

Ted Hill was a witness to the incident at the gamekeeper's cottage, being a child when it took place. He was interviewed at least twice about the episode. In an interview in 1982 by Rev. Reg Legg of Dymock, he said he was 12 years old, and in another interview, by Richard Poirier, he said he was 9 or 10 years old.[16] He recounted that he was at the gamekeeper's house when Frost came banging on the door, and saw the gamekeeper reach up for his gun and threaten the poets. The incident itself remained in his mind, but he seems to have become confused by the surrounding events. In 1982 he says that he remembers that he and another lad were "going down fro' grandmother's [at Ketford Mill] and goin' up to Gamage Hall. It was hop-picking time." On the way they had gone to visit the gamekeeper's wife. As hop-picking takes place in September, this account doesn't fit with the timing as I see it. If he was going from Ketford Bridge to Gamage Hall via the gamekeeper's cottage, he would have had to go in completely the opposite direction to Gamage Hall to get to the gamekeeper's house. However, this doesn't invalidate his evidence about the actual confrontation, which was seared into his memory. Ted Hill may have been the first person to publicly call the gamekeeper Bott, from which all subsequent references are made. He also identified the gamekeeper's cottage as being at the north end of Cobhill Rough.

The following is the chronology of events as I see it, which will be expanded below:[17]

- November 25, 1914, Wednesday: Thomas goes to stay with the Frosts at Abercrombie's cottage in Ryton, near Dymock. The Abercrombies are away (having left on November 24th).
- November 26, Thursday: Edward Thomas and Robert Frost go for a walk together and are confronted by one of George Albright's gamekeepers.
- November 27, Friday. A policeman calls in the morning (or perhaps the previous evening) with a summons for Frost. Frost contacts Wilfrid Gibson (who is unable to help). He then writes to Abercrombie.

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[15] The Ordnance Survey maps of the period put it as a minor road, rather than a bridle path that it has become.

[16] On the video 'Voices and Visions: Robert Frost.' The Annenberg/CPB Collection, 1988. The 1911 Census return gives us the only likely candidate, Edwin Hill, aged 6, living at Bromsberrow Heath; if it is him he would have been 10 years old at the time of the incident. See Matthew Hollis, op cit., p. 177.

[17] The incident itself has been dated to September (see Street, op cit., 1994, pp. 114-6), when hop-picking would have been taking place, and October (see Walsh, op cit., pp. 200-2 and Longley, op cit, p. 166). If the tone of Abercrombie's letter of December 1st to Haines is a guide, then he didn't know about the incident. Abercrombie went to Lincolnshire on October 13th, returning about November 8th, and so we can safely rule out September. In October, Edward Thomas came to the Gallows to stay with the Frosts on October 14 until about the 20th. There is no mention of any confrontation in any letters following that time, and so it is unlikely to have taken place then. The letters sent by Abercrombie to Haines on December 1st and 4th seem to date the incident to late November.

- November 28, Saturday. Abercrombie writes to Frost, and asks him to write to Jack Haines, friend and solicitor in Gloucester. He also writes to Thomas at Steep, asking him to do the same.
- November 29, Sunday. Thomas says in his Field Notebook that he went for a walk with Frost around Broom's Green and Ryton, lunching at Ryton (The Gallows).
- November 30, Monday. Thomas returns home to find a letter from Abercrombie waiting for him.
- December 1, Tuesday. Abercrombie writes to Haines; Frost writes to Haines.
- December 2, Wednesday. Thomas writes to Haines from Steep.
- December 3, Thursday. Haines writes to Abercrombie.
- December 4, Friday. Abercrombie responds to Haines's letter.

The time of day the incident took place could be significant. Like the walk they did on August 26th, when they walked through the afternoon and into the night, I would suggest that they were walking in the afternoon, probably straight after lunch, and may have walked until dusk (it was a long and aimless walk, according to Frost's account, and they were probably almost home). Sunset was around 4 p.m. Thomas wrote a friendly and informal letter on that day to W.H. Hudson in which there was not an inkling of a mention about the incident, and so we can assume the letter was written prior to their walk, probably in the morning.

Wherever the incident took place, it had to be on land leased to George Albright for 'sporting rights', and almost certainly in what has been referred to as 'Mr Albright's wood'[18] (although there seem to be many of those.) It is known that Albright leased large areas of land for sporting rights from both Frank Ricardo, including 57 acres of Little Woodend, south of Dymock, and Earl Beauchamp, including 1150 acres of the Dymock Estate (the true extent of which is not known, but almost certainly extended up to the village of Redmarley D'Abitot.)

Two places have been associated with the incident: Cobhill Rough, and the six acres of Ryton Coppice.[19] Both of these woods were owned by Earl Beauchamp but probably both leased to Albright.[20] Cobhill Rough hardly existed as a substantial wood at the time (only the small part known as Grove Coppice existed as a wood), and it was where the gamekeeper lived. Examination of all the woods in the area, bearing in mind that they were 'returning from a long and aimless walk', seems to indicate that the most likely wood near to where the incident happened was Ryton Coppice, close to where Frost and his family were living.[21]

Edward Thomas loved walking, and 'he was alert to what was happening in and on the earth and the air above it as is an animal in the grass or a bird on a tree.' The unpredictable November weather particularly appealed to him. His poem 'November', written a week after this walk with Frost, describes the weather, and that '... of all the months when earth is greener / Not one has clean skies that are cleaner.' In an initial draft of that poem, the

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[18] *Ledbury Guardian*, 19 December 1914, p. 2.

[19] Ryton Woods is a later extension to the Coppice, probably newly planted around 1905; William Stephens, a market gardener, lived in the only cottage in the wood in 1910.

[20] Concrete evidence of these leases has not yet been found. Gamekeepers could not work for two estates (e,g Beauchamp and Albright) simultaneously, according to Dr. Gilbert Greenall: "No game keeper in those days would have worked for two estates" – letter to Jeff Cooper, 27 July 2011. Gamekeepers had to register as an employee of a land-owner with the county's Clerk of the Peace under the Game Act of 1831, and Vessey was registered to Albright.

[21] Another possible wood, but perhaps too far away, is Hayes Coppice, two miles further north and situated next to Bromsberrow Place itself, one of the few mature woods in the area, but it's some distance from Vessey's cottage (other keeper's cottages are closer). Redhill Wood, which is on a steep hill side, close to where the gamekeeper lived, doesn't seem suitable. Other woods in the area have also been examined, but none seem to fit the description of game woods they may have passed through on their way home.

original lines 11-12 read, 'Only odd men (who do not matter) / Care for the mixture of earth and water'.[22] Is it conceivable that one of the 'odd men' was the gamekeeper?

It may have been quite natural for the poets to wander around the beautiful countryside for inspiration and conversation, but for a gamekeeper this would have been incomprehensible. Walking in the countryside meant two things to him: going somewhere specific, or doing something nefarious. The gamekeeper would have assumed that it was the latter if they were wandering in a game wood and obviously not going anywhere in particular.

There is good reason to think that the gamekeeper was tracking the poets soon after they went into the wood, or as Frost said, 'snooping in the hedge,' glowering at Frost and Thomas, thinking they were poachers.[23] He was almost certainly carrying a gun and probably had a dog with him, as was the custom with all gamekeepers.[24] His approach may also have been governed by his belief that the walking sticks carried by the poets were guns, and he was aware that some poachers could be extremely dangerous, and had even been known to kill gamekeepers.[25] Apparently, as they came out of the wood on to a small road, probably the Ryton to Ketford road which runs alongside Ryton Coppice and leads straight back to Ryton and Gallows cottage, they were confronted by the gamekeeper.

Frost's attitude to 'peasants' was suspect at the best of times: he had written to Sidney Cox about 5 September 1914 that 'as writers we are a little mysterious to the peasant kind.'[26] The gamekeeper will have asked them what they were doing in the wood, where they were going and, probably by implication, accused them of being poachers. This would have put Frost's back up, and it is likely that he would have shouted at the gamekeeper and become obstreperous, responding that they were just out for a stroll, and they had every right to be there because they were living at the Gallows cottage. The gamekeeper would have responded that they had no right to wander over the land: living at the Gallows did not give them that right. The gamekeeper may have raised his gun (perhaps inadvertently), which Frost found threatening, but apparently Thomas did not.

Under the Game Act of 1831 (which was the Act in force at the time), the gamekeeper would have been obliged to inform them that they had been trespassing, and ask for their names and addresses. The gamekeeper's response to knowing their addresses was to call Frost, the local resident, a 'damned cottager'. This may have a double meaning of not only a peasant – which itself would have insulted Frost – but also a person who occupies a cottage but contributes no work and little to the local economy, as well as depriving locals of a place to live. Apart from the gamekeeper's resentment, there may also have been an element of spy-mania in the whole situation. The locals were a close-knit community, where newcomers took a long time to be accepted. A couple of months before, Frost and other writers in the area had been accused of being German spies. The gamekeeper would have been aware of this, as no doubt it was a good subject for local gossip.

What is surprising is that Edward Thomas, who professed to have an understanding of country ways, would have allowed himself and Frost to be in this situation. They had walked on someone else's land where game was reared, half-way through the shooting season.[27] What reaction did he expect from the land-owner or his representative? Also,

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[22] Edward Thomas. *The Annotated Collected Poems*, edited by Edna Longley. Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2008, pp. 34 and 146-7. The poem was written on December 4th, 1914. Also Eleanor Farjeon. Walking with Edward Thomas, in her *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years*, edited by Anne Harvey. New ed. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997, pp. 275-83. Other recent articles on poets and walking include those in *Dymock Poets & Friends*, (5), 2006, 19-31; (8), 2009, 56-67; and *The Ivor Gurney Society Journal,* (17), 2011, 63-80

[23] Newdick note, in Walsh, op cit., p. 200.

[24] Interview with Nancy Turner (née Cox), retired gamekeeper, on 14 November 2011.

[25] Owen Jones and Marcus Woodward. *A Gamekeeper's Note-book.* London: Edward Arnold, 1910, pp. 260-1.

[26] Robert Frost, *Selected Letters*, p. 136, letter wrongly dated 17 September.

[27] The shooting season is August 12th to February 1st, depending on the game

why did Frost think that anyone could walk anywhere, even on someone else's property? Frost knew that if there was a law, however much he disagreed with it, it should be complied with or face the consequences. The Game Act of 1831 is specific about trespass on land where game is reared (although, of course, it is unlikely that Frost was aware of the Act, although Thomas probably was).[28] Frost knew of property rights however, and that people with land had the right to protect it. He even wrote a poem about it: 'Mending Wall', the poem that opens the collection *North of Boston*, published in 1914, in which it finishes (quoting his neighbour) 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

There are a number of Acts of Parliament that have a bearing on the treatment received by the poets. Apart from the Game Act of 1831, there was also the Prevention of Poaching Act of 1862, the Ground Game Act of 1880, and depending on other factors, the Night Poaching Act of 1828. All were in force and strictly adhered to by gamekeepers and land-owners across Britain.

The gamekeeper was actually in the right: they had been trespassing on private land, and potentially disturbing the game. Gamekeepers were 'ruthless in their war on all that they held to be enemies of game'.[29] It was the middle of the shooting season, and it was his job to make sure the land and the game were safe. This may be the reason that Thomas was reluctant to back Frost up. Frost, being the belligerent person that he was, may well have seen Thomas's reaction as being too passive and equivocal. Presumably the poets felt angry and shamefaced.

The gamekeeper made his way home. Frost remained extremely angry for being treated in what he considered to be such a shabby way by a 'peasant'. As they were leaving the situation behind them Thomas is supposed to have said something like 'something should be done'. There is some doubt about what he actually meant, but Frost's interpretation was that he believed he had Thomas's backing if he confronted the gamekeeper. Thomas, realising Frost's misinterpretation, tried to calm him down, but Frost would have none of it, and decided to find the gamekeeper's cottage. It wouldn't have been too difficult to find, because they had probably passed it before, as it was on the road connecting Ryton (near the wood and where the Frosts were living) with the larger village of Redmarley D'Abitot. Banging on the door Frost shouted something like 'Come out over the fence and I'll teach you a lesson. Come on, put 'em up.'[30] The cottage garden had a hedge of hawthorn bushes that bordered the road, and when Frost demanded that the gamekeeper come over the fence, he was probably referring to this hedge. In the house was the gamekeeper with his wife and children, as well as the young boy Ted Hill with one of his friends.[31] The gamekeeper took his shot-gun off the wall and opened the door, threatening both Frost and Thomas, who, according to Ted Hill, 'went off a bit smartish like'.[32] The poets then made their way home. They were both shaken, Frost was still angry, and Thomas was probably silent.

It wasn't unusual for people to be fined in court for using threatening or abusive language. The Gloucester and Ledbury papers report a number of such cases.[33] So it would

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[28] Thomas had reviewed the book *A Gamekeeper's Note-book*, by Owen Jones and Marcus Woodward, in *The Daily Chronicle* of 8 July 1911. The Ground Game Act is mentioned twice in the book, and he ends his review by quoting the tongue-in-cheek remark that 'a good notice for use in a strictly preserved wood is "Trespassers will be punished by transportation".'

[29] Owen Jones and Marcus Woodward, op cit., p. 18.

[30] Ted Hill's interview on video, 1988. Frost had been in court before for his aggressive behaviour: in 1896 he had initiated a fist fight that landed him in court, when he was fined $10 (Parini, p. 59; Thompson, pp. 224-7).

[31] Ted Hill was with his friend of about the same age. According to his testimony, Hill was visiting the gamekeeper's wife.

[32] Ted Hill interview with Reg Legg, 1982.

[33] The *Ledbury Guardian*, the *Gloucester Journal* and the [*Gloucester*] *Citizen* report a large number of cases where fines of up to 15s. with 7s. costs are charged for using abusive and obscene language at this time. As Edward Thomas says in his tale 'The Jolly Drover' (*The Open Window*, March 1911, p. 338): 'The magistrates are busy week after week in sentencing men and women of all ages ... for being unseemly in act or speech.'

have been a natural consequence of Frost's language and threats that a policeman should call that evening or the following morning. There was a strong bond between the police and gamekeepers, not simply to uphold the law, but as rural people they often became involved in helping the gamekeeper at game shoots (and receiving the consequent perks).[34] This policeman had a summons with him, requiring Frost to appear at the nearest Police Court, probably in Kempley. Court hearings usually took place about a fortnight from when a summons was issued. The fact that the policeman was able to find Frost so easily would indicate that the gamekeeper knew where he lived (and so must have been given his address at the initial confrontation), and it was almost certainly the same policeman who had called on them a couple of months before about the accusation of being German spies. The summons produced a reaction of angry panic, and spurred Frost into action. Initially he went to see Wilfrid Gibson.

The gentle Wilfrid Gibson has probably been maligned and misunderstood ever since he confessed to not being able to help. On being asked by Frost to give advice, Gibson felt that he could have no influence over the situation, and couldn't advise what should be done. He would have known of Frost's temperament and tendency to anger and violence, and there was no excuse for Frost's behaviour. Confrontation was not Gibson's way and he found it difficult to understand. Not being able to advise Frost what to do in the face of a summons wasn't a case of snobbery, the class system, or 'feudal lands'; it was a case of the practicalities of who you know and how to sort out the problem.

Frost had been unhappy with Gibson for some months before the incident. Gibson's review of Frost's *North of Boston* in the *Bookman* for August 1914 had annoyed him, with its balancing act between approval and rejection. He had expected more understanding and a better review. But even after the incident, Gibson still seemed to be talking amicably to Frost, and it seems that Frost began to exaggerate the lack of help he got from Gibson over the gamekeeper incident as time went on.[35]

On being told by Gibson that he was unable to help or give advice, Frost turned to Abercrombie. He was a different person altogether: Abercrombie had the means and the contacts, and instantly set about putting the incident into context and sorting it out. He was away in Surrey at the time of the incident, but on hearing from Frost he immediately asked him to write to Jack Haines, the Gloucester solicitor and friend of the poets. There are two letters that survive from this series of correspondence, both by Abercrombie to Haines. The first one reads:

> Dec. 1st.
>
> My dear Haines,
>
> Frost, I hope, has by this [time] put before you his trouble with Albright's keeper. I am trying to get at Albright personally, but don't know yet what the result will be. And if he won't keep his keeper in order, I am determined to bring the law in if it <u>can</u> come in. As to the affair in the wood, we can, of course, do nothing; but when the keeper takes to threatening Frost <u>in the road</u>, the affair is obviously intolerable & must be put a stop to. Preferably, as I say, by getting directly at Albright; for I still think there must be some misunderstanding. But I should like to know whether the fellow's brutal behaviour does make him liable to a summons. I understand Frost has Thomas as a witness.
>
> Sorry to trouble you!

---

[34] Owen Jones and Marcus Woodward, op cit., pp. 214-5.

[35] "I understand that the Gibsons were pleased with your handling of their twins." (Robert Frost to Harold Monro, December 1914) – after the affair, which doesn't sound as if he was angry or had broken off his relationship with Wilfrid Gibson. A letter from Gibson to Frost of 18 November 1915, a year after the incident, is friendly and relaxed, and actually mentions the gamekeeper as 'doubtless a German spy!' They continued to correspond until about 1940.

Yours in haste
Lascelles Abercrombie

Three days later Abercrombie had changed his tune, in response to Edward Thomas's letter written to Haines on December 2nd:

Dec. 4.
My dear Haines,

Many thanks for your most sensible letter. My sole reason for writing to you was on account of the alleged insult in the road, which, if true, was clearly intolerable & to be put a stop to somehow or other. Thomas's description of it, however, scarcely bears out Frost's, & I now believe he has rather exaggerated the incident in a way which he is a trifle inclined to: I mean he is peculiarly sensitive to anything remotely resembling insult or deliberate annoyance to himself. This is not the first time he has been aggrieved. – As to the wood incident, he had, of course, no right there. I have permission, but that does not imply permission to my friends. The strange thing was that the keeper, knowing where Frost was staying (so Frost says) should have been so unpleasant. But there is nothing actionable in that, obviously. If you can see Frost it would be a great advantage. I believe the secret of the whole thing is that Frost does not know how to talk to such folks as keepers.

We are all very well & hope you & your family are too.

Yours sincerely
Lascelles Abercrombie

[P.S.] I have asked my sister to interview Albright.

Some accounts state that Lascelles Abercrombie and Wilfrid Gibson had rights of access to the land because of their tenancy with Earl Beauchamp. This can't have been the case as there were thousands of tenants of Earl Beauchamp (and Gibson wasn't a tenant of Earl Beauchamp anyway), but this does not have a bearing here, because the trespass was on land leased to George Albright, making it Albright's responsibility. So what other explanation is there that Abercrombie should have the right to roam the land? For the answer to that we have to stretch the net a bit wider.

Abercrombie's sister Ursula had been living at the large mediaeval house Hellens in Much Marcle, about 6 miles from Ryton, since 1909. She and her husband Alec Whalley (pronounced Waley) rented the whole property, and were part of the landed gentry in the area. They were rich and pushy, and soon after they moved to the area they contacted the local hunts, as they were both keen hunters. Ursula became close friends with both Earl Beauchamp and George Albright. Through this connection, Lascelles Abercrombie and his family also became friends with them both,[36] and were given the right to roam their land, presumably as long as they were careful not to disturb the game or the livestock. This right probably did not extend to Wilfrid Gibson, and certainly not to the other writers in the area, unless Abercrombie accompanied them.

It was to his sister Ursula that Abercrombie now turned, writing to her on December 4th to go and see Albright and explain the situation, so that he was in the picture. This she did shortly afterwards. Jack Haines being professionally consulted also helped resolve the situation: the big guns were lining themselves up, and although the correspondence is missing, we can assume that letters started flying around. The landed gentry were still responsible for law and order, and it was a small world, where everyone 'of consequence' knew everyone else. The charges were presumably dropped, as there is no evidence of a

[36] Earl Beauchamp had reserved, in October 1910, The Gallows cottage in Ryton for Lascelles and his family, who moved there six months later.

court case taking place, and perhaps Frost had to make a financial contribution to the gamekeeper out of court. The whole incident had been resolved by the middle of December. In a letter to Haines of December 15th, 1914, Edward Thomas said, 'I am really glad Frost isn't being troubled [by the gamekeeper] any more. He seems himself to think he won't be.'[37] Two months later the Frosts were on their way back to America.

The answer as to whether Albright thought the gamekeeper was in the wrong for stopping and threatening the poets, and whether he was chastised for doing so, is not known for certain. Considering the gamekeeper was doing his job, it seems unlikely that he would have been reprimanded, although Albright might have had a word with him about his approach to the situation (and may have written to Frost apologising for his manner). We can be sure that Earl Beauchamp didn't have words with the gamekeeper, as Frost suggests.

Frost seemed to treat the incident in a light-hearted manner, despite his apparent anger at Wilfrid Gibson, 'the people's poet'. He wrote to Harold Monro, proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop and editor of the journal *Poetry and Drama*, shortly after the incident, 'Think of me as engaged in a little war of my own down here with a bad game keeper who attacked me for going where he allowed the Gibsons to go as gentry. Me he called a "damned cottager". Now who will have the better claim to the title of the People's Poet? Thomas says it is the best testimonial I have had and I must get my publisher to use the game keeper in advertising me.'[38] As we have seen, Frost continued to use the incident as an amusing after-dinner story.

The significance of Thomas's involvement had been overlooked until Matthew Hollis's book,[39] when he speculated that Thomas, who was prone to excessive self-examination, had been seriously affected by the incident. On Christmas day, 1914, a month after the incident, Thomas wrote a parody of the old English folk song 'The Lincolnshire Poacher' entitled 'An Old Song [1]'.[40] In it he wrote the stanzas

> I roamed where nobody had a right but keepers and squires, and there
> I sought for nests, wild flowers, oak sticks, and moles, both far and near,
> And had to run from farmers, and learnt the Lincolnshire song:
> 'Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the season of the year.'
>
> I took those walks years after, talking with friend of dear,
> Or solitary musings; but when the moon shone clear
> I had no joy or sorrow that could not be expressed
> By ''Tis my delight of a shiny night in the season of the year.'
>
> Since then I've thrown away a chance to fight a gamekeeper;
> And I less often trespass, and what I see or hear
> Is mostly from the road or path by day: yet still I sing:
> 'Oh, 'tis my delight of a shiny night in the season of the year.'

As time went on, Thomas became a man haunted by his inability to deal with these types of situations. It is therefore possible that the incident was one of the contributing factors to him joining the army six months later to fight in the war.

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[37] Letter in Gloucestershire Archives. Frost later acknowledged that Abercrombie had 'settled the gamekeeper' incident: see *Selected Letters*, op cit., p. 193.
[38] Robert Frost's *Selected Letters*, op cit, p. 142. Letter dated December 1914.
[39] Matthew Hollis, op cit., pp. 175-182.
[40] See Edward Thomas. *The Annotated Collected Poems*, edited by Edna Longley. Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2008, p. 166. It is almost certainly a coincidence that the gamekeeper, Fred Vessey, came from Lincolnshire.

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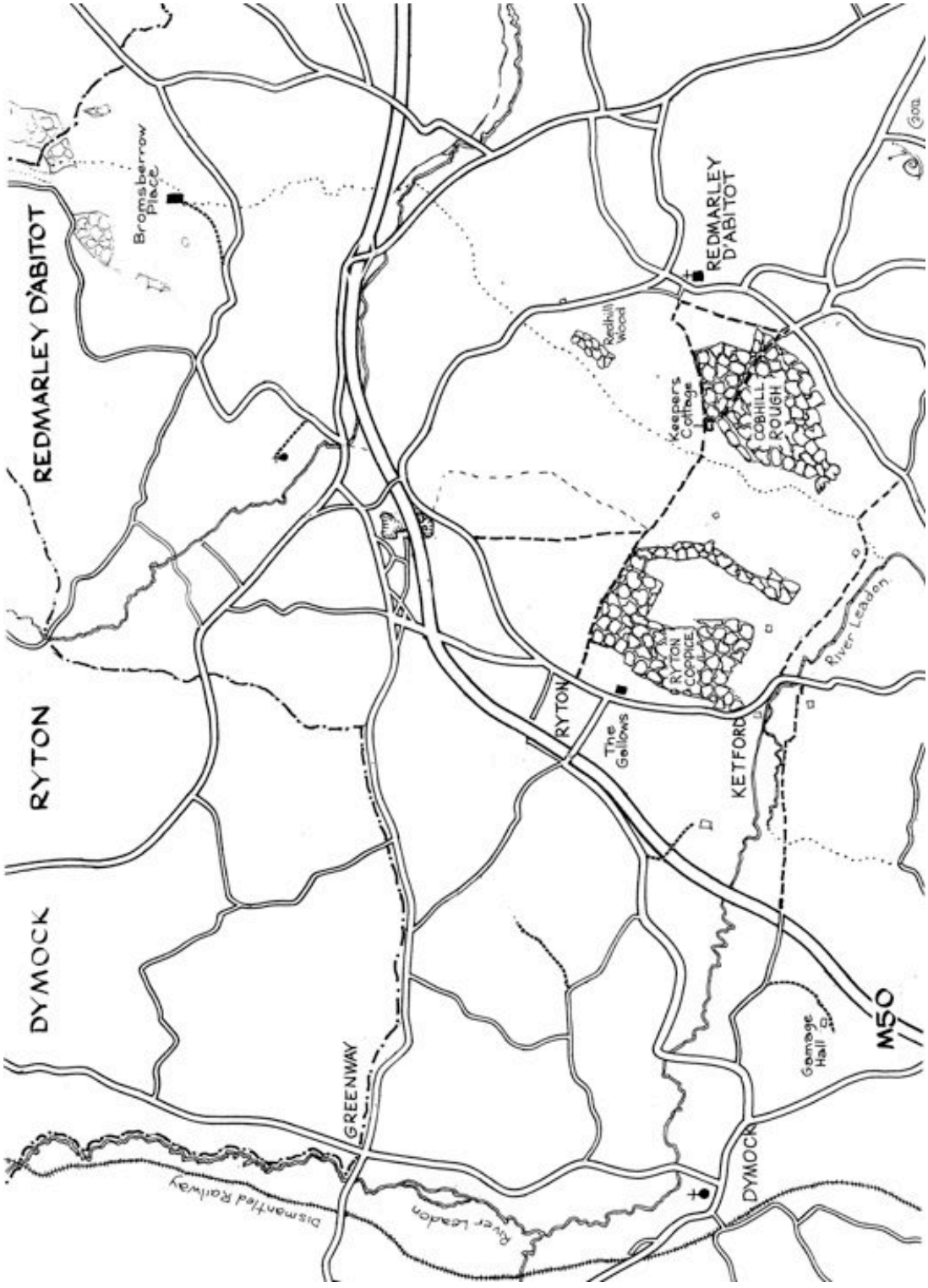

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from *A Conscious Englishman* by Margaret Thompson

Late August, 1914.

They would miss seeing the September cider pressing, but there was no help for it.

In the Oldfields orchard the cider apples were showing rosy red stripes against the yellow. Mary had told him that they flourished because of the wassailing each New Year day. Well, perhaps, but the effect of such a perfect summer must have helped. He thought of Shakespeare's Justice Shallow, those comical ramblings in a Gloucestershire orchard – that sense of an eternal rural England. Animated by cider, surely? Ah, a long drink of cool cider on a day like this; what could be more delicious?

He had come to tell Robert about his leaving, and knew what his reaction would be.

Robert and Elinor were together in the sitting room, but Elinor left them and went upstairs. Lesley was typing out a fair copy of *The Bouquet* on the sturdy Blickensderfer they'd brought from home. Edward admired her efforts.

'Lesley,' he said, 'if your Daddy has his way and I ever manage to write a verse you shall have it for the *Bouquet*. Then I'll be able to say I'm a published poet. '

'I'll hold you to that, Mr Thomas. We'll probably bring out another soon', Lesley said.

'Mmmh, I'm afraid soon will be too soon then. Robert, listen. I am going to have to travel north to write those pieces for the English Review. Then I have the blessed Duke to research. After that who knows.'

'What! – sheer journalism, quite unworthy of you. Any fool could do it. Tell them you've changed your mind.'

'Not possible - we need the money! And as a matter of fact, Robert, I do feel interested in the question of what it means to people, ordinary people, being at war. I find myself remembering how we were at Oxford - news came of the relief of Mafeking and we students went quite mad with patriotic zeal. What that chiefly meant was that we all got very drunk and behaved very badly. These are different times, I think. So, now I do need to get back and do some repair work on my old Humber if it's to take me as far as Newcastle, with help from the railways of course. But we've several days left.'

'Well, I reckon it's just too bad. I feel let down. And what about Helen and the children? What will they do?'

'They'll take the train back to Steep. Helen makes some money taking in Bedales' boarders who have to come back early before their term starts. I expect she'll write today to offer it. But Robert, don't imagine you've seen the last of me. Leddington's a second home to me now. I'll be back before long, either at Mary Chandler's or up in your attic again, if you and Elinor will have me. And besides, we've these few days left - lets you and I walk tomorrow; there are places I must go, to say my good-byes. And I intend to drink my fill of Gloucestershire cider while I can.'

The lane to Dymock ran between more orchards full of ripe fruit, the early morning sun casting long shadows across it and into the fields that sloped towards the river. They passed the two neighbouring farmhouses, mellow brick-built buildings like Oldfields. Mirabels Farm must of course be named for the little purple plums. But why Swords? Names of things, of places. He wondered if it was connected with the moated ruin of a building they saw as they struck out down a field path. Wilfred Gibson, who lived at the half-timbered cottage on the corner, would know, but he was away. They crossed the railway bridge and the river and passed his rather fine cottage, once a nail-maker's house.

'I guess when you're gone I'll see more of him again', Robert said. 'He was my pal here, until you and I met up. And Abercrombie too. But never as good a pal as you, my dear friend.'

'I do like Abercrombie,' Edward said. 'And Catherine. But I'm afraid, because I dared to put in a word or two of reservation about his verse in a review, she's cross with me. It is an error common in wives. But it does no one a service to have nothing to say but praise. If I read such a review I assume the author is a close friend or relation and I've no faith in what's written at all.'

'I know. You even managed to find a couple of faults in *North of Boston*! But Catherine Abercrombie has a good heart – she'll forgive you. She'd forgive you anything, I do believe, for being¾ '

'Being what? What are you laughing at?'

'For being "the most beautiful person she has ever seen." That's what she said to Elinor! She said it was a shock, until you got used to it. What is it with you and the girls, Edward?'

'Oh Good Lord. Really? And what did Elinor say to that?'

'I darn well trust she didn't agree! Anyway, about Catherine¾ you know, it's possible we may stay with them when the fall comes. They say they have room. And our house is so damned cold when the wind whistles through from front to back. So when you come to stay again, that's where we should be, and may it be soon.'

They went on into Dymock. Robert admired the half-timbered houses, very like Little Iddens, lining the street. Beauchamp Green, with its row of lime trees leading up from the road to the lych gate, invited them to rest. They sat for a while under the silvered oak of the lych, looking down the valley. 'You should have seen it last April,' Robert said. 'A torrent of little yellow daffodils tumbling down to the brook. Beautiful.'

Two gypsies came up to them, a young woman smoking a clay pipe, with a baby in her brown shawl, and a thin young man with a concertina. The woman asked for money for the baby, but they'd scarcely any money and what they had was for cider at the Beauchamp Arms. Seeing Edward with his pipe she asked if he could spare half a pipe of tobacco. He looked long at her and smiled. Her brown fingers dipped delicately into the leather pouch he held out to her as she gazed back at him. Then she laughed, waved and went away, gracefully swaying across the green with the baby on her hip.

'They remind me of gypsies I saw at a Christmas fair last year,' Edward said. 'The brother had the blackest, wildest eyes. He played a tambourine and stamped his feet. Then he took up his mouth organ and played "Over the hills and far away". Everyone at the fair drew round and watched. That wildness, coming into our humdrum lives! Later I was walking on in the darkest of nights, only a sliver of crescent moon. I felt as if I were a ghost wandering in the underworld, but the image of him stayed with me, the wild bright spark in his eyes, and the memory of the tune. Ah, gypsies – George Borrow, of course, knew them best¾ but since his time they're turned away from the verges, the No Man's Gardens. Poor tired horses and sleeping children driven out by some officious policeman.'

They talked about gypsies, Edward's enthusiasm for Borrow and whether gypsy characters could be found in America.

'I sense from what you say that your people and ours – our country people anyway, are quite different,' Edward said. 'The people in your poems too; they seem to me to be rather without tradition and they don't quite trust themselves or each other. They show a good deal of competition and suspicion, you must admit.'

'Sure, of course – how else could it be? Each man for himself and his family.'

'Well, up to a point. But in England I believe there's a sort of native wisdom binding people together. My old Dad Uzzell from Wiltshire, who taught me about country life and started me off on Jefferies; no-one was more trusting and good to his neighbours than he, but no fool, far from it. Without the Dad Uzzells around me I think I'd find the country a sterile place to be.'

Robert was baffled. 'You're a strange man, Edward,' he said. 'I used to think you were a real solitary, thriving on being separate, like me. But maybe I was wrong. Even though it

doesn't come easily to you, you really want to be connected to other people in a way I just don't understand.'

The talk took them through their cider-drinking at the Beauchamp Arms. They poured it from a height of a foot into their tankards to aerate the golden liquid with its faint tinge of green. It tasted of late summer and of ripeness, smelled of apples, grass and honey.

Edward leaned back in his chair and stretched happily,

'Perfect! Ah, cider apples – but think, the centuries it took to arrive at this perfection. Those iron-age men in the Malverns would only have had crabs. Then by the time of Robert of Gloucester they'd got as far as apple-jacks, the same as those Falstaff ordered, you know. And today, this. Perfection. Did you know you shouldn't tap the new cider until you hear the first cuckoo of spring? '

They both emptied and refilled their tankards.

'Does this Beauchamp guy own everything around here?' Robert said. 'Surely looks like it. I know he owns Abercrombie's place. Abercrombie's sister got it for him. She has that sort of pedigree, by marriage anyway.'

'Well, the Beauchamps somehow managed to keep their land in spite of Cromwell. Truly landed gentry. They're welcome to it, though, don't you think. Don't envy them, Robert. I know I'll never own land and I don't want to, always troubling yourself about it, putting up petty notices, do this, don't do that. Keep out. The land is mine to enjoy without any of those troubles.'

They got up shakily and held on to each other laughing. Robert was no drinker.

'We'd better sit back on that seat by the church for a while. No hurry,' Robert said. 'There's all the time there is.'

The road stretched pale and empty when they did start out for home in the dusk. A low pink-washed farmhouse crouching at the foot of a great elm tree gleamed palely, lamplight yellow in one window. Edward stood looking, then spoke quietly.

'When we were here in June they'd almost finished hay-making, do you remember? The scent of it on the road. The wagon nearly fully laden, standing in the shade of that yew, and the men taking a rest, leaning on their rakes; they and the horses utterly silent and still. It was as if they'd been there since the beginning of time and would be always the same, older than everything, even older than the farmhouse. Utterly timeless. Immortal.'

'You're full of good memories today, Edward.'

' I know I'll never forget this place, this summer. The way the sun has shone on us, on our walks and talks. It's made some ideas clearer to me, and I believe that's true for you too. You have a great gift for talking about poetry as well as for writing it, Robert. That's why I think you should write that book. And as for me, you've given me a sense of something – of possibilities ¾ that I haven't had before. Ambition even.'

'That's what I want to hear. Ambition is good – I have it aplenty myself and it beats me how a man can live without it. Only I tell you again, the place to be ambitious is in America. Progress and adventure, not always looking back. That's why I'm pretty near ready to go home and I'm damned if you're not going to come with me!'

'We'll see. Robert, you know how I waver. I do want to, believe me, but the truth is I have to depend on uncertain things. But look, it's getting late, we'd better hurry on.'

'No hurry, it's great to walk in the dark. All the time there is,' Robert drawled.

This is such a human landscape, Edward thought; every quarter of a mile or so another cottage or farmhouse. And always the high elms and the Lombardy poplars, reaching up into the darkening sky and sheltering each house. They passed a cottage in the dusk, seeing a faint light from the small square window and a thin line of blue smoke against the leaves of its sheltering elms. No-one could see that cottage and not long for his own home, or dream that this cottage was his home, he thought.

The silver sliver of a new moon rose near the horizon.

Suddenly Edward stopped. He thought of France, of the soldiers there. He wondered how many of them would be seeing the same moon – or would they be too blinded to notice it? Blinded by smoke, excitement, pain, or terror? Vividly he pictured them, their eyes briefly glancing at the same moon that he was seeing from a safe and silent lane.

His mind was flooded with a new and overwhelming emotion. He stood still, gazing at the moon, while Robert walked ahead.

Something essential was missing, he realised, in all his love and admiration for English landscapes, these cottages, farms and trees, the country life. It seemed to him that he loved England in a foolish superficial way, only in terms of charm and aesthetics. As though he were just a detached observer. It was as if he hadn't acknowledged it as *his* country.

To acknowledge it, perhaps – did not that mean he should be willing to die for his country? To do *something*, at least.

'What's halting you, Ed?' Robert called. Edward didn't hear him.

Would something have to be done, he thought, before he even had the right to look again with appreciation and composure at English landscape? At the elms and poplars around the houses, at the white campion flowers in the verges each side of the lane, the verges known as 'No Man's Garden'.

(See http://publishingmyedwardthomas.blogspot.co.uk/)

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Sorrow of True Love
by Philip Pegler

I have just completed a biography of Clare Cameron, a gifted English nature poet, who was close friend and mentor to me in my youth. Clare was at the peak of her creative powers in the colourful decade of the 1960s when she was well into middle age, but already early on in her career she had earned warm accolades for her promising nature writing - and was even described by one reviewer as 'sister in art' to Edward Thomas and Richard Jefferies. This intriguing detail, which emerged in my research, was followed by my discovery of several vivid letters from Helen Thomas to Clare and her husband, the London writer Thomas Burke, which I examine in this chapter from my forthcoming book, entitled *Hidden Beauty of the Commonplace*. (The work is to be published in the Spring of 2013 by Changemakers Books, an imprint of John Hunt Publishing.)

Deciphering Helen's letters proved none too easy, but my wife, Wendy, and I found we had not been alone in such a difficulty when afterwards I read Eleanor Farjeon's witty and affectionate description of that very challenge in her book of memoirs, *Edward Thomas - the last four years*. 'For someone like Helen who lived the lives of several women in full,' wrote Eleanor,' everything she did must be done with rapidity, and her writing is more like a housefly's idea of shorthand than anything else I can think of. Her letters have to be read, first by inspiration and finally by sheer knowledge of her dear self; *this* undecipherable sentence must be *thus*, for *those* are the only words that would express her…'

*

And you, Helen what should I give you?
So many things I would give you
Had I an infinite great store
Offered me and I stood before
To choose, I would give you youth,

All kinds of loveliness and truth,
A clear eye as good as mine,
Land, waters, flowers, wine,
As many children as your heart
Might wish for, a far better art
Than mine can be, all you have lost
Upon the travelling waters tossed,
Or given to me…

These strangely touching lines form part of a moving poetic tribute dedicated by the First World War poet, Edward Thomas to his wife Helen and three children. The series of four Household Poems first appeared in a slim early collection of his poetry, published just six months after his tragic and premature death while serving as a gunnery officer on the Western Front at the Battle of Arras on Easter Day in April 1917.

If he *should ever by chance grow rich*, suggested Thomas in a wonderful sequence of verses, he would buy and then give to his family as much as he possibly could of the countryside familiar to them with all its hidden treasures. The words, expressing so much tender care for those he loved, tumble out in a vibrant profusion of vivid but gentle imagery of wild flowers and orchards, fields, roads and walls 'where the sun untroubled by north wind falls, and single trees where the thrush sings well…' Precisely dedicated to each family member in turn, according to their particular gifts, preferences and needs, these poems are exquisite and quite unforgettable.

Edward Thomas had formerly earned an uncertain living as a prolific freelance writer of evocative prose describing country life. He had struggled in often straitened circumstance with his devoted and long-suffering wife to bring up their first-born son and two young daughters, as he wrestled with tormenting doubts to find sufficient sense of purpose to bring him enduring relief from dark and despondent moods. Now at last, in the final period of a brief but intense literary career, he had begun to find freedom in the discovery of his true vocation as a fine nature poet – only to have his life poignantly cut short a matter of weeks after he had been plunged into the stark horrors of war.

Clare Cameron must have been deeply gratified when her own sensitive and lyrical poems and prose were favourably compared to those of the quietly brilliant young Welsh writer ten years later. This was upon the publication in 1928 of *Green Fields of England,* her book of footpath travels, warmly received by critics and public alike - but a greater surprise was in store. Unexpectedly her husband, Thomas Burke received a letter from Helen Thomas after she had read a magazine article by Burke, which praised Edward. It was the beginning of a brief but warm personal correspondence between the Burkes and the courageous widow of Edward Thomas, which is valuable for the way it focuses attention on a formative period of Clare's creative life and illuminates the rich tradition of rural literature she loved and with which she deeply identified.

Considering her latest literary offering in the London *Morning Post* on October 3rd 1930, the reviewer spoke of Clare's 'attempt to capture the mood of the English pastoral.' The journalist went on to describe her as *a sister-in-art* not only to Edward Thomas, but also to the nature writer, Richard Jefferies, of whom Thomas himself had written a thoughtful biography. Edward had completed this study of the man he idolised, just five years before the Great War had erupted to shatter the ordered peace of Edwardian England; the urgency of the challenge the conflict represented had then prompted an entire generation of able-bodied men to enlist in order to protect the ancient liberties and beautiful countryside, which Richard Jefferies had lovingly described in Victorian times. When it became Clare's turn to explore the richness of England's rural heritage after the end of hostilities, she was praised for showing readers 'how the harvest of a quiet mind may be gathered in at a small

cost.' The reviewer concluded that the delicate pencil drawings in the book were entirely 'appropriate to the spirit of this charming and companionable book of Nature worship.'

Less shy and restrained than Edward Thomas had been in his youth, but courteous and fervent of spirit like him, Clare found her own uniquely feminine manner of expressing the delicate sweetness of profound human affection.

Let no one ever come, my dear
Into that quiet space
Where we have hid the shared joys
The splendid moments and the sad,
The sweetness and the grace.
Let no one ever come, my dear,
It is a holy place.

Let no one ever come, my dear,
Into that secret shrine
Where is the singing waterfall
And bracken in the burning noon
Beneath the brooding pine.
Let no one ever come, my dear,
For those are yours and mine.

Clare followed this tranquil poem, which is included in her book, with two richly descriptive chapters outlining her walking tour of Wales - a country Edward Thomas loved above all as his native home. She found it a beautiful, wild land of rain, mist and dark enchantment; in other essays she relates how she tramped the length and breadth of England too, visiting many of the same places explored by Thomas, who had described both the landscape and wild life he had seen, as well as the curious country characters he had met, with the meticulous eye for detail of a born naturalist. Thomas knew particularly well that English region of the *South Country*, which takes in the soft, rolling hills of the South Downs where Clare ended up living; he had walked across the fields just yards away from our own house near the Sussex coast, visiting James Guthrie, of the Pear Tree Press, the printer and publisher of some of his early work at Flansham - and as a young man he had gone swimming in the sea adjoining the quaint village of Felpham nearby, where the great poet William Blake had lived two centuries before. Later Edward Thomas lived with his family for ten years in another village, called Steep just a few miles from the woodland cottage where my wife and I presently live further inland; every year on or near the date of his birth in March, members of the literary fellowship, which exists to promote his life and work, gather around a hilltop memorial stone dedicated to his memory, above the rural settlement below where the Thomas family had lived. In warm spring sunshine or driving rain, it is always a special occasion, for there is surely something admirable about a diverse group of people prepared to toil up an austere hill each and every year in all weathers simply to honour a quietly-spoken poet, who loved this place now firmly linked to his memory.

A close friend of Edward Thomas once described him as *a fine and troubled spirit;* it is a poignant description of a man not easily forgotten! Thomas was a tall, slender and handsome figure and that same friend found him altogether happier and less sombre of mood than his photographs suggest – there was something *forever inexpressible* about him.

*

Clare never met Edward, but they belonged to the same era. Having a great deal in common in their love of Nature and with their ardent search for harmony, beauty and self-knowledge, their lives had overlapped and they shared that heightened awareness of unity with the natural world, which is the true mark of a mystic.

Both Edward Thomas and his wife Helen were nearly twenty years older than Clare, while Helen for her part shared many of the younger woman's trenchant and unconventional views on social issues of the day, including the burning question of women's rights. By the time Helen had contacted Clare's husband, she had lived in London for a few years, but had only just emerged from a prolonged period of ill health, brought on by the terrible shock of her own husband's death. She was *delighted and touched* by the sympathetic references to Edward in the piece Tommy had written.

'Your article brought back vividly to my memory those hard days, when as you say, a little encouragement would have meant so much in every way to my husband… I cannot tell you how great is my satisfaction whenever I read such appreciation,' she wrote.

'He was, as the world rates success entirely unsuccessful, but I know of no man who so universally created wherever he went the love and admiration of the people he met.

'As you so rightly point out – and it has been a bitter thought to me many a time – the editors and periodicals, who could have helped him so much in his lifetime, refused to recognise his genius, yet it has been recognised by others after his death.

'But gradually he is being recognised as filling a niche among the immortals and such sincere appreciation as you so generously give cannot fail to help the process of establishing his genius.'

In glad response, Tommy invited Helen to visit them both at their London home. She enjoyed the occasion a great deal and after a pause sent Clare a copy of the first short volume of her memoirs about Edward Thomas, which had recently been published to considerable acclaim.

'Here at last is my little book. I hope you will like it, though I shall perfectly understand if you don't,' she wrote tentatively.

'I have been very poorly since I saw you and I would have written before to tell you how very much I enjoyed meeting you and Mr.Burke - and how I hope to see you again. It is lovely to meet someone like yourself, who really loves the English country and is contented and satisfied by the intimacies of hedge and copse and village.' Clare was clearly moved by the warm and candid quality of this book and told Helen so - at the same time sending examples of her own work. Helen was delighted and wrote back in turn; her note is natural and unaffected, adorned by delightful domestic touches.

'It is wonderful to receive a letter like yours. Indeed I can hardly believe it, but I do believe it and am happy and proud that my little book should call forth such warm appreciation.'

So far Helen had only had time to *dip into* Clare's latest book but found it difficult to put it down before *going to see about the dinner.* It is in such small domestic details, in this exchange of brief letters, that we are afforded a glimpse of that quality of warm and unassuming immediacy, which distinguishes Helen's own writing and has endeared her to her own readership.

Helen Thomas embarked upon these two slim volumes – entitled *As it Was* and *World without End* – with the simple wish to record the depths of her love for her husband, but this task was also to prove an effective means of extinguishing the searing pain of her bereavement. The impassioned gravity of her sometimes anguished account touched many people - much to her surprise - although some members of her family and friends of Edward were uncomfortable with her candour. For a while Helen was feted in literary circles and this restored her confidence, enabling her to find fresh hope. At last she felt able to discern her true life's purpose – and found immense solace in dedicating the rest of her long life to establishing Edward's literary reputation as one of the finest poets of his day.

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In her lyrical account, Helen writes tenderly of her final anguished parting with the man, who had been the love of her life. Edward had unexpectedly been granted the opportunity to spend Christmas with his family before military embarkation to France, but despite their best attempts to celebrate the festivities in the bitterly cold and snowy weather of that winter, there was an unspoken tension in the house and Helen's heart was heavy with sorrow at his impending departure. On the final morning of his leave, the couple hugged and spoke of their undying love before going outside to find the frozen landscape cloaked in an oppressive mist. Edward left Helen at the gate with the children and descended the hill, turning to wave goodbye. Even after he had vanished from sight, he still called out to her through the muffled air and she answered until she could no longer hear his distant voice. Immediately panic seized her and she ran through the mist and snow to the top of the hill where she stood for a moment dumbly with straining eyes and ears. She felt then, in a moment of utter grief, that there was nothing but the *mist and the snow and the silence of death.* Finally, overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding, she stumbled back to an empty house.

Edward Thomas himself recorded this final parting with his family without emotion, but his own letters home sent from the trenches, are full of profound feeling and he kept a diary of his last days in France as he prepared his men for the attack at Arras. In the small notebook, which was found on his unmarked body after he had been killed by the blast of a passing shell, he wrote that he *never understood quite what was meant by God*. Somehow however, In the midst of the horrors of war, he had still been able to find joy in the meticulous observation of Nature.

Edward Thomas had found a curious satisfaction and sense of peace in the ordered routine of service life. His brief war diary makes compelling reading, for his observations are poignant and the pages full of fertile seeds of ideas, books and poems never to be written. Much to the astonishment of his literary friends, accustomed to his pessimistic moods, he emerges from it as a self-contained, efficient officer, very different from the hesitant and self-doubting person he had so often imagined himself to be. His commanding officer found him reliable and helpful as he carried on quietly and patiently with his duties until he was killed barely two months into his stint on the front line.

'His serene and kindly presence and quiet dry humour did much to alleviate the squalid miseries of life for his companions,' later wrote Edward's superior with deep respect - and there could hardly be a more telling and unequivocal tribute to the sensitive writer's courage than this recollection.

Edward Thomas had written his final poem back in England on January 13th 1917. This was shortly after bidding farewell to his family and just before he left military quarters for France to defend those values of noble integrity and freedom he held dear – and he even mentions in his diary having written the lines earlier that day. He was nearly thirty nine and need not have enlisted, but it was his clear wish to do so and in this beautiful last verse he writes gently of the real meaning of love in the sensitive and dignified manner, which came naturally to him. It is highly unlikely that Clare ever read the poem, but had she done so, she would have undoubtedly felt moved by the sadness of the words and recognised the extent of his poetic genius, which had been cut off so abruptly just as it had emerged.

The sorrow of true love is a great sorrow
And true love parting blackens a bright morrow:
Yet almost they equal joys, since their despair
Is but hope blinded by its tears, and clear
Above the storm the heavens wait to be seen.
But greater sorrow from less love has been

That can mistake lack of despair for hope
And knows not tempest and the perfect scope
Of summer, but a frozen drizzle perpetual
Of drops that from remorse and pity fall
And cannot ever shine in the sun or thaw,
Removed eternally from the sun's law.

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Reviews

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), ed. by Matthew Bradley (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Were he disposed to describe insane melancholia, writes William James in the *Varieties*, he would need to tell a frightening tale: 'desperation absolute and complete, the whole universe coagulating about the sufferer into a material of overwhelming horror, surrounding him without opening or end. Not the conception or intellectual perception of evil, but the grisly blood-freezing, heart-palsying sensation of it close upon one, and no other conception or sensation able to live for a moment in its presence. How irrelevantly remote seem all our usual refined optimisms and intellectual and moral consolations in presence of a need of help like this. Here is the core of the religious problem: Help! Help!' (p.129)

It is a dramatic aside. With syntax designed to build pace and magnify suffocation, through adjectival pairs and compounds, with a visceral metaphor, a repeated emphasis on the ability of *nothing* to withstand this creeping terror, that insidious 'our', and a dramatic rendition of the victim's cry for succour, James drags his audience right into the midst of this viscous misery. The fear is palpable, the impotence universal; reason and intellect flee in the face of this desperate despair. James's verbal and rhetorical artistry is striking, but so too is his empathy. Willingly he inhabits, and asks us to inhabit, a state of extreme emotional intensity. No less remarkable is the interested attention he gives to this 'sufferer' in 'need of help'. Yet perhaps most significant of all is the fact that this remains an aside. He is not, as it turns out, disposed to describe such things. No abyss can throw James off course. The door to evil can, it seems, be opened and closed at will.

And this, I think, is part of the thrill and the distinction of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James's Gifford lectures, originally delivered in Edinburgh in 1901-2, and recently re-issued by Oxford World's Classics in a new edition by Matthew Bradley. Here we are assailed by an immensity of vivid, overpowering subjective experience from across the ages, related first hand and often at length. And yet here we also have as our constant guide and companion the lucid, articulate, judicious, punctiliously self-aware, good-humoured and above all commonsensical James, making a claim for the American intellectual in the home of the Scottish Enlightenment. Setting out to describe the 'feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude [...] in relation to whatever they may consider divine' (p.32), calmly he invites us, by identifying in such experiences common patterns, processes and categories, to bring these religious tremblings and rejoicings within the reach of psychological study and understanding, building on the conceptions of consciousness he had already advanced in his more well known work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890).

This is, James would have us believe, a modest project. With a nod to previous holders of the lectureship, which, since Lord Gifford's bequest in 1887, had sought to open the field of natural theology both to the students and local residents of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrew's and Aberdeen, James nervously sidesteps all he is not: 'neither a theologian,

nor a scholar learned in the history of religions, nor an anthropologist. Psychology is the only branch of learning in which I am particularly versed' (p.12). At the start, and consistently throughout, he reminds us that to describe a phenomenon is not to assess its truth. Whether the 'divine' which orients these various experiences actually exists, is not, he avers, for him to say.

Indeed we might feel that the question of God's actual existence neither troubles nor really interests James, and certainly the historically specific and socially or politically embroiled intricacies of theological, doctrinal, or denominational debate do not claim his attention. In this, the book he at one point calls his 'natural history of human consciousness' (p.202), he achieves a broad historical sweep, and although his examples represent almost exclusively Christian and predominantly Protestant thought, within these boundaries he criss-crosses traditions with gusto. We hear records of faith experience from recognisable names such as Augustine, Bunyan, Luther, Wesley, and George Fox, and from the less immediately memorable figures of American Protestantism: Horace Fletcher, Henry Wood, Henry Alline. As James moves from one individual case to the next, he builds his own map of religious experience around his personally coined reference points of the 'healthy-minded', the 'sick-souls' and 'the divided self'. Always he encourages us to see psychological type and process, and his commentaries on the array of diaries, letters, sermons, and memoirs he cites, attempt a psychological and secular re-writing of what his subjects choose to understand in religious terms.

Thus he introduces us to 'sanguine healthy-mindedness' (p.114), the 'sky-blue optimistic gospel' (p.110), those religious characters who not only see sin, evil, suffering, as 'a waste element, to be sloughed off and negated, and the very memory of it, if possible, wiped out and forgotten' (p.108), but who may even be, perhaps by nature, perhaps by will, perhaps through involvement with what he calls the increasingly popular 'mind-cure movement', blind to 'the all-encompassing blackness' (p.112). On the other hand, we might group together the 'sick souls', those who 'cannot throw off the burden of the consciousness of evil' (p.108-9), those sensitive beings with such low thresholds of misery, or fear or pain, that nothing can obscure the 'worm at the core of our usual springs of delight' (p.113). If you have the misfortune to be a 'sick soul', weighed down by compunction or remorse, all too aware of having done the things you ought not to have done, chance has it that you will also suffer a 'divided self', a state of chaos, of storm, a discordant heterogeneity of being in which parts of the self are at war with others. Such sufferers long for stability and unity, and yet never can they attain the heaven of the healthy-minded, never for them the innocence of the 'once-born': 'they have drunk too deeply of the cup of bitterness ever to forget its taste, and their redemption is into a universe two stories deep' (p.148). With infectious zeal, James's perusal of his diverse documents of Christian experience produces paradigms of the shallowly happy and the deeply troubled that surely resonate in American literature of the early twentieth century and beyond.

But it is when he comes to deal with experiences of conversion that James is able to push his psychological reading of religion in more innovative directions. Building on the work of contemporary American psychologists of religion, such as Starbuck and Leuba, and with the aid of his own verbal ingenuity, he seeks models of mind that help to explain these surprising transformations without necessary reference to an external deity. So he asks us to see consciousness as a field, in which diverse groups of ideas are spread from centre to periphery. When the focus of a person's life changes and the 'centre of his energy' shifts, these ideas may form into new configurations, with things hitherto at the margins becoming re-positioned at the centre, re-mapping, as it were, the self (pp.153-55). Or he invites us to imagine a human mind of 'unsuspected depth', harbouring 'possibilities of character disposed in a series of layers or shells, of whose existence we have no premonitory knowledge' (p.180), and presents conversion as no more than the realisation of one such latent possibility. This is all building up, of course, to what he calls the 'most important step

forward that has occurred in psychology' (p.182), the concept he accords most authority in illuminating the problem of the converts: the subconscious. 'If the grace of God miraculously operates', he writes, 'it probably operates through the subliminal door' (p.210). Certainly in implying that no element of the conversion experience transcends the individual's personality James's model appears to deny the involvement of a supernatural being – but not necessarily, he cheerily, and astutely, reminds us: 'it is logically conceivable that *if there be* higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so *might be* our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them' (p.189-90). It is a characteristic formulation. James is – mostly – a poised thinker, anxious to claim no more than is reasonable, open to possibility, unafraid of ambivalence. This is someone who 'fear[s] to lose truth by [the] pretension to possess it already wholly'. The 'wisest critic' after all, he reminds us, is 'an altering being, subject to the better insights of the morrow' (p.257).

Yet if James the psychologist is cautiously evasive when it comes to the matter of essential metaphysical truth, he is absolutely and pointedly interested in the question of *worth*. Does religious experience help us? What kind of 'judgement' can be made as to the 'value and positive meaning of all the religious trouble and happiness we have seen' (p.202)? And as he endeavours to address this question by evaluating the experiences of those saints who for him embody the religious life we might feel we glimpse a little more of the man himself. The sweet excesses of devotion – 'puerile' and 'paltry-minded' become frequent terms here – receive little sympathy: 'spiritual excitement takes pathological forms whenever other interests are too few and the intellect too narrow' (p.262). Retreat from the world is equally disdained, as is the drive for purity: 'better that a life should contract many a dirt-mark than forfeit usefulness' (p.272). The 'ascetic discipline', on the other hand, as an alternative to contemporary 'worship of material luxury and wealth' with its 'effeminacy and unmanliness', receives James's endorsement. Might it not, after all, guard against a 'certain trashiness of fibre' in the young? Is not poverty the 'strenuous life' *par excellence*? (p.280). Even as he falls back on Herbert Spencer to construe the worth of the saints in terms of their adaptation to their environment, and concludes on the typically fine-tuned note that no 'absolute' judgements in this area are possible, James's efforts to pin down the value of his extravagant religious personalities situate the *Varieties* in significant turn of the century debates, particularly in American but also in English writing, about feeling, masculinity, and consumption, among others.

This mammoth book reflects a capacious mind. It straddles centuries, disciplines and continents. As James addresses his religious inheritance, we re-encounter a God-fearing or God-embracing but always soul-heavy Christian earnestness of the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; but at the same time we are pitched into that ferment of Darwinism, neurology, consciousness and contingency that we associate with the beginning of the twentieth. We might read the *Varieties*, as Matthew Bradley suggests in his introduction, in terms of James's debt to his father, or in line with his personal trajectory from the experimental psychology of his earlier works towards the philosophies of perception and value that he would express in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909). We might also read it alongside Freud, Jung, and their successors, as a text that brings the language and experience of Christian faith into the remit of psychological study and offers unwittingly a perhaps more hopeful version of that 'subliminal door'. But points of contact proliferate above all in the sphere of fin-de-siècle and early Modernist literature: not only do the *Varieties* beg an obvious relationship with the work of William's brother, Henry, but those grim narratives of darkness echo Conrad, the 'layers and shells' of character anticipate Woolf, and James's thoughts on mysticism resonate with Symbolist poetry and drama from Symons to Maeterlinck.

As he draws to his conclusions, James toughens up. He claims to be 'appalled at the amount of emotionality' his lectures have encompassed (p.368). Yet it is these voices of

religious experience, the sources he calls his 'palpitating documents' (p.381), that make the *Varieties* such a compelling read. James comes hospitably to rest in the final position that 'our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist', but whatever we make of his explications, and whether we espouse a Christian world view or not, as readers we must surely agree that in the fragments of vivid subjectivity he has assembled for our attention, 'higher energies filter in' (p.392). This is an engrossing, stimulating, enriching, exhausting book, thoroughly worth this lucid and scholarly edition.

Fiona Macdonald

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The Dark Earth and the Light Sky, Almeida Theatre

Was Nick Dear's play, directed by Richard Eyre, worth a trek on a cold wet November night to Islington? The answer is overwhelmingly "yes"!

It can sometimes be difficult to be objective about a subject we believe we know so well and characters we see so clearly in our mind's eye. It is therefore probably best to take a step back to see if anything new is revealed by another person's interpretation. It may be that dramatic licence has to be accepted to emphasise a subtle point.

The storyline is a familiar one which sees Edward Thomas through the eyes of those closest to him. The story begins in 1910 and takes us through to his death focusing upon three main characters, Edward, Helen and Robert Frost. The relationship between these three is at the heart of the play. Apart from exploring the relationship between them there are also insights into the relationship between Edward and his father and between Helen and Eleanor and also Frost. Right at the start Helen sets the tone by summarising her life with Edward and poses the question as to why Edward enlisted. The evolving incident between Edward, Frost and the Gamekeeper and the implied perception of cowardice is pivotal to the storyline.

As far as accuracy is concerned, it prompted a re-read of "Under Storm's Wing" and found that the plot follows Helen's account most of the time. The casting was very good, the physical characterisation was impressive and it would be hard to imagine better likenesses. Edward's depression and his solitary struggle were captured together with the impact on those he loved. An audience not so familiar with Edward's life would have little difficulty in following the story and it would, hopefully whet their appetite to explore the subject further.

It was interesting to note the sources Nick Dear used, these being Edward's letters to Helen and also Jesse Bridge, "Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years", "Elected Friends: Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to One Another", "Under Storm's Wing" and biographical works on Frost.

The production is performed on an earth covered stage with a brick wall backdrop. The set was atmospherically lit with a sepia feel to it. Twenty eight scenes did at first seem rather excessive for an average length play, however, they were succinct and seamless providing a well paced drama.

The acting was convincing overall particularly in Helen's and Edward's roles. Pip Carter, playing Edward, delivered the only poem of the production in the last scene. His final delivery of "Lights Out" was spellbinding and an emotional climax. It was interesting and fitting that during the curtain call; Pip Carter remained in character which held on to the atmosphere he had created in his role.

Stephen Turner

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Other News

In Peter Dale's *Diffractions: New and Collected Poems* (Anvil), his introduction opens with a reference to Edward Thomas: 'Robert Frost speaks teasingly of the road less travelled by; Edward Thomas took the road heavily travelled to the First World War trenches. Both led to remarkable poetry.' The volume also contains the three poems that were first published in *Branch-Lines*: 'The Unknown Flower', is dedicated to E.T. Peter is an ETF member.

Painting Wandsworth: Watercolours 1770-1925: this exhibition at Wandsworth Museum, 38 West Hill SW18 runs until 24 February 2013 and features a quotation from *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* on the label for the painting *Mill on the Wandle* by F. Ramsey (1890) and also writ large on the wall in another part of the room.

1914 'Echoes' – Three Choirs Festival commission: 'Plans are well underway for our 1914 centenary choral commission which we hope will strike a chord with many of you and lead to your unequivocal support. We are joining forces with Chemnitz Opera to commission a 40 minute choral work by German composer Torsten Rasch to explore the effect of war on those left behind. Performances will take place at the Three Choirs Festival Worcester in July 2014 and Chemnitz in March 2015.'

David Jones in the Great War by Thomas Dilworth presents life on the front line, challenging accepted wisdom about Jones's service and recounting the events which would be depicted in David Jones's great visual and literary modernist artworks. ISBN: 978-1-907587-24-5. Hardback: £15. Enitharmon Press, 26b Caversham Road, London, NW5 2DU, 020 7482 5967. info@enitharmon.co.uk. www.enitharmon.co.uk.

Larry Skillman and Colin Thornton gave a reading in conjunction with the 'Edward Thomas' museum exhibition at St. Peter's Hall, Petersfield, to an audience of about eighty people. The exhibition was created by the curator Dr. Kathrin Pieren. She has borrowed many first-class artefacts from Cardiff University, including Edward's pocket watch, which records the time of his death. http://www.visit-hampshire.co.uk/whats-on/edward-thomas-exhibition-at-the-petersfield-museum-p881841

Philip Henderson is a classical composer and has set some of Edward's poems to music for the Leeds University. He has composed a work that uses three of Edward's poems and also includes a section from Helen's *World Without End*. With the choir of Leeds University (The Clothworkers Consort of Leeds) he has made a demonstration recording. The sequence of his piece will be 'Adlestrop', 'So We Lay, All Night', 'The Cherry Trees', 'Lights Out'. A CD, which will include this work, will be released in the Autumn, and a concert, which will include this work, is at The Square Chapel Halifax on May 25th. The concert will be advertised as 'Under The Wide And Starry Sky'. www.philipgwhenderson.com

Email news service from the Fellowship. We can now subscribe online to receive occasional email news alerts from the Edward Thomas Fellowship, informing us of such things as imminent performances and broadcasts, non-Fellowship events, and new publications, as well as early announcements of Fellowship events. This facility will be administered by Martin Haggerty, one of our committee-members and the manager of our website. It is open to anyone to subscribe to these e-bulletins, and it is hoped that, not only will they encourage further knowledge and appreciation of Edward Thomas far afield, but they will also enhance the profile of the Fellowship, and perhaps encourage new people to join our society. The sign-up page can be accessed through our website at <www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk>.

from 'The First Day of Spring' by Helen Thomas

The three children lived in the farm house with their mother and father, Bessie the maid, Rags the dog and Alfred the cat. Their names were Philip, Elizabeth, and Polly.

Philip was eight years old, Elizabeth six, but as Polly was only a baby her age doesn't count. The dog was called Rags because he was a very raggle-taggle looking creature; an Irish terrier with long rough brown hair, and a tail curling over his back. He was a great fighter and a hunter, but was the friend of everyone at the farm and liked to be included in all the children's games. This was sometimes a nuisance, so Philip or Elizabeth would throw him a bone which he would carry off to a special corner in the orchard and gnaw for a long time until he found out he had been tricked, when he would bury his bone and rush all over the farm with his nose to the ground trying to track the children, which he nearly always succeeded in doing. If they had gone in the milk cart with Shaver, Rags went into his kennel which was a sign that he was very unhappy.

The cat was called Alfred because when he was a kitten, too small to have been given a name, he sat blinking and half asleep before the kitchen fire while a large batch of rock cakes which Bessie had put in the oven to bake, while she ran out to have a chat with Charlie who was her young man, were burnt to cinders. Even when Bessie suddenly smelling the burning cakes rushed into the kitchen and throwing open the oven door let out the spicey smoke of two dozen rock cakes, the yellow kitten never turned a hair, and so earned his histories name. The children's surname was Townsend.

The children's father wrote books which meant amongst other things different from most fathers, that he did not go to an office every day, but lived at home all day, and so was often with the children. He knew a great deal about birds and flowers and animals, and he was very clever at making things for the children. They liked going walks with him into the woods to find – but not to rob – birds' nests, or up on to the Pilgrim's Way, where they found the big Roman snails which were good to eat, and where in one special place the nightingale sang. Philip went fishing with him in the great pond a mile or more away, and all the children used to go with him to the meet of the fox hounds, Polly being carried on his shoulders clinging with her fat little hands to his rather long hair.

Their mother knew about flowers and cooking, and games and sewing and many other things. She could always think of a good game to play, and when they wanted to be Red Indians or pilgrims or King Arthur's knights she was very clever at making the proper clothes out of sacking or oil cloth, and helped with wigwams or palaces or whatever might be needed. Also she told them stories and sang to them while she sewed in the fields or round the fire. So the children were lucky in their parents.

The farm house was an old one and stood square and plain in the Weald of Kent. Polly had been born there and so she was the only one of the family who was a true Man of Kent. The other two had been born in Kent but not in the Weald, and so were only Kentish Men. This was a great grief to the elder children but particularly to Elizabeth who would have given Polly even her dolls' house could Polly have given her the title of Man of Kent in exchange. But it was irrevocable, and the worst of it was that Polly being a baby did not care twopence about her birthright and coveted the dolls' house which she was not allowed to play with. Philip pretended not to mind, and even went so far as to say that Kentish Men were more respected than Men of Kent. So when they played Crusaders the charge was always led by Kentish Men, leaving the Men of Kent far behind picking the heads off daisies instead of wrestling the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens.

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Back cover: Anne Mallinson at The White Horse, June 2009.