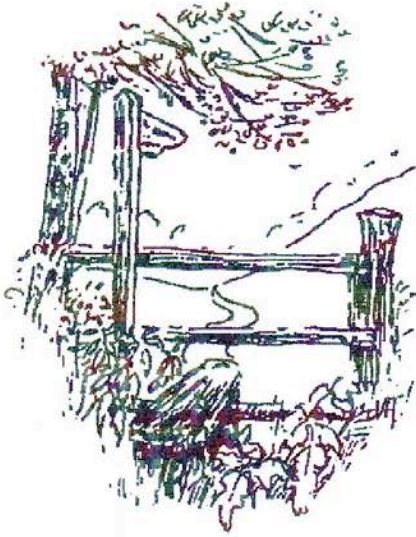


THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 70

August 2013

If the writing of Latin and Greek verse is good, then the writing of English is still better, as an educational instrument, but without any originality of thought or observation it is doubtful whether the public can profit by the spectacle of a man educating himself in this fashion, though Mr. J. E. H. is not by any means the greatest of offenders from the ancient Universities.





The Birthday Walk



The Quantocks walk

(cover: the Quantocks walk)

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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.

THE EDWARD CAWSTON THOMAS PRIZE

After the sad and unexpected death of our former Chairman, Edward Cawston Thomas, we were informed that he had kindly left the Fellowship one thousand pounds. The Committee has in consultation with Jennifer Thomas discussed how best to apply the money, and decided to award an annual prize of £100.00 for a poem or piece of prose writing about, or connected with, Edward Thomas. Initially, the decision is to alternate poetry and prose year by year, and we will monitor this to ensure that it is successful, making any changes necessary as we gain experience. The Prize should be self-supporting and entry will be open to members and non-members of the Fellowship. It will be advertised in the Newsletter, on the website and in the TLS. The first year's prize will be for a poem. Prose will be limited to 1000 words. All entries will be filtered by members of the Committee, and a distinguished writer will make the final judgment from a shortlist.

For the first competition, poems should be sent by 30th June 2014 to the Chairman, Richard Emeny, Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 6NQ. Poems should be submitted by mail and the full name and address of the sender must be supplied. No previously published work will be considered. There is an entry fee of £5.00 for entrants under 21 and £10.00 for those over 21. The winner's name will be published in the Newsletter and on the website, and the prize will be presented at the Birthday Walk each year. Please contact the Chairman with any queries.

Seán Street's poem about Anne Mallinson was read at the Birthday Walk.

Selborne

Anne Mallinson, 1929-2013

If a place can photograph itself,
 somewhere there's a blurred image exists
 between house and Plestor of you caught
 in the act of just being yourself.
 No trick of light, more than memory,
 some people form rhymes with where they are.

See Seán's new collection, *Cello* (Rockingham Press, 2013), p. 48.

**A celebration of 'In Pursuit of Spring'
 29th June 2013**

'.....Thus I leapt over April and into May, as I sat in the sun on the north side of Cothelstone Hill on the 28th day of March, the last day of my journey westward to find the Spring.'

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the journey described in "In Pursuit of Spring", a party of 14 made up of Fellowship members, their spouses and friends gathered on 29th June at Lydiard Hill car park on the Quantocks. It was a near perfect summer's day; warm and clear affording excellent views all around the compass.

The day began with a walk northwest along the Quantock Hill ridge above West Bagborough (scene of the 2009 autumn meeting of the Fellowship) toward Triscombe Stone where lunch was taken with views across the western edge of the Quantocks to Minehead. After lunch, the walk continued toward Crowcombe Combe gate around the edge of Great Hill giving views of Stowborrow Hill, Beacon Hill, Thorncombe Hill before returning via Wills Neck to the car park. During the walk the following was read: excerpts from *In Pursuit of Spring*, chapters I describing the journey and X covering the Quantock ridge, Stowborrow Hill, Beacon Hill, Thorncombe Hill, Great Hill, Will's Neck, Lydeard Hill and Cothelstone Hill; excerpt from *A Literary Pilgrim in England, from The West Country*, Coleridge; poems by Edward Thomas, *It was upon, July and Haymaking*. After a break, the party travelled by car to Cothelstone Hill car park before walking up the northeast face of the hill to the summit. Here there were clear views across the Bristol Channel to the Mendips, Brent Knoll, Steep Holm and Flat Holm and through a light blue haze to Wales. There were readings from chapter X of *In Pursuit of Spring*, 'Thus I leapt over April and into May, as I sat in the sun on the north side of Cothelstone Hill on the 28th day of March, the last day of my journey westward to find the Spring' and the poems, *Bright Clouds* and *the Gypsy*.

The day ended with tea for all at a local Hostelry.

The Extra Edward Thomas Walk – Saturday 8th June 2013

Twelve Fellowship members and friends met for the second annual Extra walk at Steep on Saturday 8th June for the walk led by Pam and Stephen Turner. It was a more informal but nevertheless more demanding walk than the Birthday Walk and at a wonderful time of year. The trees were in full leaf, crops waved gently in the fields and wild flowers were in abundance. The intention of the walk was to capture the spirit of Edward Thomas following tracks and paths that he would have taken himself. Poems were read along the way which tried to reflect the season. Pam read "The Swifts" to start us off and we walked through the village. We climbed up on The Hangers Way by Ashford Stream to Cockshott Lane. Terry Lloyd read "It was Upon" whilst we caught our breath. Old Litten Lane then took us up to the field where the O.S. trig point adopted by the Fellowship stands. From there we joined Green Lane, described in "The Lane" which Peter Harris read. From here the pace seemed to quicken at the mention of lunch at the White Horse Inn aka The Pub With No Name. The Landlady seemed honoured by the Fellowship's visit and had reserved the "Edward Thomas Bar" for our use.

After a leisurely lunch Stephen read the extract from "Up In The Wind" which described the setting of the Inn. The walk followed the lanes bordered by amazing displays of wild garlic. The highlight of the day for some of us was the visit to the remote Priors Dean churchyard. We reflected that it had been many years since an Edward Thomas walk had visited it. Colin Thornton read "The Manor Farm" which mentioned the Church and the enormous ancient Yew tree in the churchyard. We then climbed up Oakshott Hanger to visit the memorial stone on Shoulder of Mutton hill. David Thomas read the melancholic poem "What Will They Do" at the stone.

We returned down the hill to Steep, admiring the wild orchids on the way. On arriving back at Steep we enjoyed elderflower cordial and homemade biscuits served from the cool box in the boot of Stephen's car. This was a welcome end to a memorable day.

Anyone who would be interested in a similar walk in 2014 should contact Stephen 01252 810852 or stephenjturner1@aol.com) to register an interest and to be kept informed of future similar walks.

ETF June Walk by Terry Lloyd

Stephen Turner arranged an extra walk in Hampshire for the more “hardy” walkers. Was that a misprint, did he mean “foolhardy”? In fact, because the weather provided perfect walking conditions, the walk was not too challenging and all twelve walkers completed the route in good order.

As usual there were readings along the way including two in Priors Dean churchyard, where we also admired the venerable yew tree. The poor little church, bereft even of a dedication, looks very plain in comparison with its magnificent neighbour. A yew tree, with its longevity, toxicity, strength, dark and evergreen foliage was held sacred in pre-Christian times. Edward Thomas hints at this spiritual legacy in the poem *Words*, when he refers to words as “Older far than oldest yew”. This made me wonder whether the tree was planted near the church to stop herders grazing their livestock on holy land, or was the church built on land around the yew tree that had long been used as a meeting place. Edward Thomas himself was non-committal, saying only in *The Manor Farm* that it “and church and yew-tree opposite, in age its equals”.

Man records what he does and the church can be dated fairly precisely to 1120 -1130AD. Nature is not so accommodating, so that dating the yew tree is a much greater challenge. David Bellamy, using the work of Allen Meredith, a 1970's mystic to whom druids spoke in dreams, has been issuing certificated claims of age for veteran yews. As result over 130 English churchyards have yews that are said to be older than the establishment of Christianity in this country, but archaeologists cast considerable doubt on some of these claims. Often the yew can be seen to harmonise with the plan of the church for which it was planted, which implies that the church was laid out first and the yews came afterwards. Common sense would suggest this as the general rule, but what of the pair at Priors Dean?

The only method available to the ETF walkers to resolve the problem was to hold fingertips and see how many were required to encircle the trunk at shoulder height. This turned out to be six and gave a rough girth of 8.52m. As indicated already, going from girth to age is most uncertain, but the best source appears to be *Growth Rate of Taxus Baccata: An Empirically Generated Growth Curve*, Toby Hindson, 2000, revised 2007, to be found at <http://www.ancient-yew.org/userfiles/file/The%20Growth%20Rate%20of%20Taxus%20Baccata.pdf> This indicates that the Priors Dean yew has an age of 1800 years – twice the age of the church. Hindson actually gives our yew a girth of 7.82m, but this does not alter the conclusion that the tree is considerably older than the church.

The Genesis of the Birthday Walk

Members often ask how the annual Birthday Walk was started. It is appropriate that what happened is recorded now, as in the last newsletter we had the sad duty of reporting the death of Anne Mallinson, the first Chairman and one of the founders of the Fellowship, who worked so hard for it for many years. In 1973 Anne was running the Selborne Bookshop, which specialised in the work of writers, notably Jane Austen, Edward Thomas, George Bourne (or Sturt), William Cobbett, Gilbert White and Flora Thompson, who had all lived reasonably locally during part at least of their lives. In addition, Anne stocked an immense range of books about rural life and matters. To many, including me, the shop became a regular place of pilgrimage. Not only were there interesting books in abundance, but there were always interesting and changing displays, and one was assured of a wonderful welcome and never knew who one might meet there. On the opposite side of the road, the Queen's Hotel, then in its heyday, became a sort of village club in the evenings, and what a distinguished clientele it had.

On 3rd March 1973, Edward Thomas's birthday, Major John Bowen of Petersfield decided to walk from Steep to Selborne as a tribute to the poet and in celebration of the similar walk described in Helen Thomas's *World Without End*. "Come on" he calls "and let's go to Selborne. You've never been there. We needn't touch roads at all, you'll love it, and I know a woodpecker's nest." John Bowen was a writer, a poet and a devotee of the work of Edward Thomas. He was also responsible for the delightful physic garden in Petersfield, which still flourishes and is open to the public.

He set off alone from the foot of the Shoulder of Mutton near the Thomas's first Hampshire home, Berryfield Cottage. At the Memorial Stone, and sitting on it, he found two boys, 11 year old Stephen Peatfield of Ashford Lane, Steep and his friend Francis Carpenter together with Lucky their black and white collie companion. Telling them of his mission, the two boys asked if they could accompany him, and so it was that the three walkers repeating Helen's and Edward's walk of more than sixty years before inadvertently inaugurated the birthday walk.

When they reached Selborne the walkers refreshed themselves at the Queen's and called in to Anne's shop, where they explained what they had been doing and discussed the possibility of further walks. Anne presented John Bowen with a copy of *As It Was & World Without End* and the boys with the *Selected Poems*, having agreed to make the walk an annual event. Anne put up a notice in her shop inviting others to join the next walk in 1974 on Sunday 3rd March. The Fellowship has a copy of this notice in its Archive. As we now know, it was successful in encouraging many others to take part; it led indirectly to the commissioning of the Memorial Windows in Steep Church engraved by Laurence Whistler, and to the celebrations of the centenary of Edward Thomas's birth in 1978. From that chance beginning the Fellowship was formed. John Bowen died many years ago, and it was a pleasure to see his son at the Birthday Walk this year. Anne eventually had to close the shop and she moved away from Selborne into Sussex, but she continued to play her part in the work of the Fellowship until a few months before her death.

Patrick Garland, 10TH APRIL 1935 - 20TH APRIL 2013

Patrick Garland was one of the most distinguished theatre directors of the second half of the twentieth century. Best known for classical productions such as *A Doll's House*, *An Enemy of the People*, *The Merchant of Venice* and the like, he was equally at home directing Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady* and other lighter plays and musicals. He had two spells as Artistic Director of the Chichester Festival Theatre and worked for a while interviewing figures such as Philip Larkin, Ralph Richardson, John Gielgud and Noel Coward for BBC Television. He also specialised in producing one man shows like *Brief Lives* with Roy Dotrice.

Patrick was also a novelist and a poet, and it was perhaps the latter interest which drew him to Edward Thomas, for whose work he had a deep admiration from an early age. He joined the Fellowship at its outset and always remained with it even when his busy life took him to America, and he found time to help with a number of events and study days. He was a quiet, kindly and courteous man and our thoughts are with Alexandra, his widow, who helped him through a long and unpleasant illness.

Richard Emeny

An Extraordinary Discovery in Devon

On a cold late February day between snowfalls, my wife and I drove from our home in Somerset some forty-five miles to West Devon. Forty-five miles is not far these days- by motorway anyway, but there are parts of West Devon far away from motorways or main roads that seem to be still resting happily in the 1950s, especially in their small towns, shops and general prosperity, or lack of it. Not one might think a place to find a treasure trove of Edward Thomas items. Our destination was a charming cottage on the edge of a rather flat boggy landscape, its fields characterised by tufts of marsh grass, tall hedgerow trees, and on that day looking grey and tired with snow still settled in parts. It was not the holiday maker's vision of the West Country, but definitely beautiful in a slightly mournful, understated way.

We were given by the very hospitable cottage owners, Mr and Mrs Field, a box of books and some documents, none of them on the face of it looking especially exciting. It was however, probably the most important discovery of Thomasiana since Edward Cawston Thomas came across his grandfather's War Diary, now deposited in the National Library of Wales. The books included the copy of *North of Boston*, inscribed by Robert Frost to Thomas, and the edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* given by Helen to Edward in January 1917, inscribed by her and which he took to the Western Front a few days later. It was returned to her after his death. A full description of the books can be found at the end of this article. How they found their way to West Devon is strange.

In the early 1930s Helen Thomas was living in the Vale of Health, Hampstead. Her two books, *As It Was* and *World Without End* had been successful and had

brought her many new acquaintances. Among these were Robin Tanner and his brother-in-law, Cyril Rice, who came from the Chippenham area of Wiltshire. Robin Tanner later became famous as a wood engraver, particularly of the villages and country of North Wiltshire, while Cyril Rice worked in education. Both men made a pilgrimage to visit Helen in London to tell her of their love of Edward's work and their appreciation of her books. They found that many of their interests coincided, in particular their love of fine craftsmanship and their aspiration to follow William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement. They became firm and lifelong friends, so it was natural that when Helen decided to move away from London, the two men offered to help her find a suitable house.

It was Cyril Rice who suggested Starwell Farm: he had come to know and like the Tuckers, who farmed it. They had not been there very long, as, together with others, they had been legally removed from their previous farm on Salisbury Plain by the military. Starwell had been found for them as a replacement. It divided into two easily enough, and they took to Helen and she to them and she was happy at the farm. Additionally, the area had many associations with Edward: Broughton Gifford was not far away, nor were the Marlborough Downs, Swindon and Jefferies country. Salisbury Plain itself and some of the places along the route of *In Pursuit of Spring* were also reasonably close.

When she moved to Starwell Farm, Helen realised that she had too many possessions to fit into her part of the house, which was more or less a two up, two down apartment. Cyril Rice had built his own large house on the edge of Chippenham and had land including workshops and space enough to store furniture and chattels, so Helen and he arranged for her surplus items to be stored at his house. Included were the 'West Devon' books. Over the years, and especially when after the Second World War Helen moved away from Wiltshire to Eastbury in the Lambourn Valley, many of her possessions were returned to her or other members of the family. But not the books, which remained in Cyril Rice's house for approximately eighty years- until 2012. During that period Helen, Bronwen, Myfanwy and Mervyn died. Cyril joined the Fellowship at its beginning, but died soon afterwards. His first wife predeceased him and he had married again; it was the death of his second wife in 2012, and the consequent disposal of the Chippenham, house and its contents, that revealed the existence of the hoard of books. One of his daughters, to whom we are very grateful, took the books to her remote Devon cottage and decided that they should be returned to the Thomas family. They are now with Rosemary Vellender, who intends to present them to one of the collections of her grandfather's work in this country.

It is unclear, and we will probably never know, how the books came to be forgotten. Indeed, they include such personal, important and intimate items that it seems unlikely that they would have been forgotten by Helen at least, yet somehow they were, and we have Cyril Rice's family to thank for ensuring they are now back with the Thomas family and will be placed in the public domain.

Richard Emeny, April 2013

THE BOOKS, as they were placed in the box.

1. Matthew Arnold's Poetical Works, Macmillan 1897, inscribed in his writing 'Edward Thomas';
2. Spencer's Poetical Works, OUP 1912, inscribed 'Edward Thomas & P. M. A. Thomas Nov. 1924' (P.M.A.Thomas was Mervyn);
3. Rousseau, Macmillan, inscribed 'Philip Edward Thomas, Nov. 1896';
4. The Sonnets of William Shakespeare, George Bell & Son, 1901 (binding marked 1899), inscribed by Helen 'To Edward from Helen Jan. 11th 1917';
5. Tomfooleries by Tomfool, At the Office of the Daily Mail, inscribed 'Dear Helen from her Tomfool, 28th Jan. 1923'. (Tomfool was a nom de plume of Eleanor Farjeon);
6. North, by Sidney Snaith, inscribed 'Mrs Thomas from Stanley Snaith 3.1.34';
7. Little Things, Verses for the Master, by Jesse Berridge, inscribed 'Helen Thomas with love from Jesse Berridge' with a letter from him to Helen slipped inside and dated 1937;
8. Poems by Edward Thomas, Selwyn & Blount, inscribed 'From my beloved to me at Forge Cottage Oct, 1917'. This is particularly moving as Helen must have inscribed it to herself after Edward's death at Easter 1917 on the publication of the book, when she was living in Forge Cottage, Otford;
9. Essays of Today and Yesterday, by Edward Thomas, Harrap. No inscription;
10. Lafcadio Hearn by Edward Thomas, Constable, inscribed by him 'To the Bard Gwili';
11. Poems and Songs for the Open Air, inscribed by Edward 'For Helen'. (Helen was also the dedicatee);
12. The Country by Edward Thomas, Batsford, no inscription;
13. Celtic Stories. Inscribed by Edward ' And especially for Merfyn, Bronwen & Myfanwy Thomas 23-xi-11';
14. Jesus, Man of Genius, by John Middleton Murry, inscribed 'To Helen Christmas 1926 from J. Middleton Murry';
15. The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, Smith, Elder & Company (vol1 only), inscribed 'Philip Edward Thomas '96';
16. Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn, Constable, no inscription;
17. The One I Knew Best of All, by Mrs F. Burnett, Warne & Co, inscribed 'Helen Berenice Noble from her loving father and mother. Christmas 1892'. (Helen has coloured some of the illustrations);
18. North of Boston by Robert Frost, London, David Nutt, inscribed 'Edward Thomas from Robert Frost May 1914'.
19. Nursery Rhymes of London Town by Eleanor Farjeon, inscribed 'Edward from Eleanor Nov. 18th 1916';
20. The Elf , Bourne Press, inscribed 'Edward Thomas To the Editor of the Daily Chronicle'. (The Bourne Press was one of the imprints of James Guthrie);
21. Winter Harvest by Andrew Young, Nonesuch Press, inscribed 'To Helen Thomas from Andrew Young December 1933.'

The Secretary writes: You will have read Richard Emeny's account of how Helen's books came to light recently. This is Myfanwy's daughter's account of how those books were lost and found, approximately seventy-six years after they were given for the safe keeping of Mr and Mrs Cyril Rice of Chippenham, Wiltshire. This is her way of telling the story as far as she knows it and as Rosemary says 'so many facts are unknown and there is no way of finding out the truth as everyone of that era is now dead'.

The Lost and Found Books, Manuscripts and Documents of Helen and Edward Thomas, my Grandparents.

Sometime during the 1920's my widowed grandmother Helen bought the lease of 5, The Gables, Vale of Health, Hampstead, London NW3. She had become very friendly during this time with Cyril Rice and girlfriend Grace Tanner (she was a sister of Robin Tanner the engraver) and used to visit them at Chippenham. I believe they married about 1931/1932 and had a house built for them in Sheldon Road, Chippenham.

About 1936 Gran wanted to move out of London to be in the country near friends. They found half a very small farmhouse to rent near the beautiful village of Biddestone - less than two miles from her friends. Her land lords at Starwell Farm were Harold and Adeline Tucker (I am not sure of the spelling of this name). There was a pump and stone sink under cover by their back doors, which they shared. There was no electricity, drains, bathroom and an outside earth closet (fortunately not shared). Gran had the slightly smaller half - two bedrooms, a kitchen (no sink or drain) and a small sitting room. We had a very small tin bath by the kitchen fire - all the water had to be heated by the primus and small Valor oil stove (run on paraffin). After everyone had had their bath - more hot water added between each person, the water had to be bailed out into a bucket and emptied outside.

About 1936/1937 Gran moved into her half of Starwell Farm but still kept on 5, The Gables until just after the outbreak of World War II and before the air raids started. I have no exact date of the move. She obviously left some of the precious books and a few other things for safe keeping with the Rices during the move, and then completely forgot all about them.

After Cyril's wife died he eventually remarried. Cyril died many years ago, leaving his second wife living in the same house. She died in 2012 and some of Cyril and Grace's six children had the job of cleaning out the entire house for it to be sold. This is when the books etc. were found. They were taken to the eldest daughter Susan and her husband Colin who live in Pancrasweek, Devon.

I had letters from Sue to tell me all this and sometime later Richard and Liz Emeny very kindly offered to collect them and bring the box of books to me. Inside the box was the hand written first chapter of Helen's first book "As it Was". Also their original marriage certificate (with a Victorian one penny stamp on it) and a very tattered and torn copy of Merfyn's birth certificate issued very close to his seventeenth birthday 1917 and on the back was stamped Epping Recruiting Office.

My cousin Charles – Bronwen’s only son, agreed with me that all the books should be donated to Cardiff University where a number of other books and items are kept.

My mother Myfanwy often said that a number of books were missing and had no idea what had become of them. I only wish she was alive to hear that they were all in a very safe place and had now surfaced after all these years.

Between 1936/ 1937 and about 1941 my grandmother spent some time in London and some at the farm. I remember 5, The Gables well – A row of maybe eight to ten probably Georgian three storey houses, all with basements. Steps led down from the front door to the pavement and then straight onto the heath. I am sure those house are very expensive now. Gran’s ‘maid’ Nellie – a real cockney eventually married a Mr Borrowes (Nellie always referred to him like this), and they took over the lease. She came to stay at Bridge Cottage many years ago. She did not like the country!

I would like to thank Sue Field and her siblings for all her wonderful work of recovering the long lost and forgotten books. They have all been so very kind and helpful.

Rosemary Vellender
23rd May 2013

‘What Quests they Propose!’ The importance of roads and travelling by Heather Cobby

It is widely acknowledged that roads and paths were of vital importance to Edward Thomas in taking him towards and into nature, as therapy for depression through his ecstatic experiences, back to his homeland in the longing of *hiraeth*, as an outlet for his quasi-religious spirituality, and for his writing. In her preface to one of his travel books, *The South Country*, his wife Helen says, ‘But almost his greatest pleasure, and certainly his greatest need, was to walk and be alone in the country he has called “The South Country”’.¹ Robert Macfarlane describes Thomas setting off on long walking tours alone in the march-lands of Wales and England hoping that he might ‘out-march the causes of his sadness’.² His way of easing it was to walk in the countryside night and day whenever he could. Richard Harries, a theologian who has studied and lectured on Thomas, mentions the “deep spiritual unrest” he suffered which is described by Helen, and how neither of them recognised it earlier in their relationship but which was to “overshadow so much of his life and mine”.³ Thomas himself, writing to his friend Eleanor Farjeon in 1913, described one of its main features as extreme self-consciousness, ‘his central evil’, ‘now amounting to a

¹ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2009) p. 13.

² Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta Books, 2008) p. 7.

³ Richard Harries, ‘Poetry in a time of Unbelief: Edward Thomas and the Elusive Call’, *The Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter*, 60(2008), pp. 10-24.

disease⁴. All his life he had been troubled by it and he describes it in his book *Richard Jefferies* as 'perhaps the most tragic condition of man's greatness'.

Jefferies has just seen a 'scarlet-spotted fly enjoying the sun' in his essay, 'The July Grass', and resolves to be like it, that he 'will not think; he will be unconscious, he will live'. Thomas calls it the 'terror' and explains that, 'If the sea-waves were to be self-conscious, they would cease to wash the shore; a self-conscious world would fester and stink in a month', but he believes that Jefferies survived the 'terror' and desired to be like the fly.⁵ Unfortunately Thomas did not, but he did manage to live with it more easily later in his life when his poetry began to flow and he felt more at peace with himself.

Roads and footpaths took Thomas towards this inner peace, away from his self-consciousness and depression towards moments of ecstasy and truth, truth about his real self, and the truth of the 'moments' he was always trying to understand, which were produced by deeper communion and oneness with nature. He describes the 'long white roads' excitedly in *The South Country*: 'What quests they propose! They take us away to the 'thin air of the future or to the underworld of the past'.⁶ The future here was an exhilarating prospect with new possibilities, the prospect of which led him away from the present and back to a happier past. The 'underworld' of the past with its connotations of darkness and the mystery of hidden and secret things was also exciting to him and would give him memories which in turn would produce ecstatic moments. He especially loved old roads as he felt they were more in harmony with nature and the landscape. Another of his travel books, *The Ickniel Way*, begins with a chapter on roads and footpaths and Thomas explains how the making of old roads is one of the 'most natural operations of man, one in which he least conflicts with nature and the animals'.⁷ He speaks ecstatically in *The South Country* of all the 'thoughts and fancies and recollections that come to one who goes in solitude along that old road when the scent of the dying year is pungent as smoke and sweet as flowers'.⁸ The old road stimulates his memory and imagination via his senses, again enabling him to return to the past which to him was the 'only dead thing that smells sweet'.⁹ This stimulation invigorated his dull brain, overworked from the 'hack' work, as he called the journalism he had to do to supplement his income from commissioned books.

On the first page of *The Ickniel Way*, Thomas shows his appreciation for the feeling that nomadic peoples had for the importance of the roads of antiquity and the way roads 'wandered like rivers through the land', emphasising their humanity and the similarity to his own way of walking, as well as the inverted notion that they have a necessity to keep in motion. As will be seen in chapter three this idea contrasts strongly with his view of other man-made constructions like cathedrals, which he often dislikes. He explains, in a conceit we have probably lost today when we barely see the road for the traffic, how roads are 'always going' and 'no man is too late'. Introducing a lively piece of humour he describes how a boy was asked where a certain lane went to: 'I have been living here these sixteen years and it has

⁴ Eleanor Farjeon, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (Stroud: Sutton, 1997) p.13.

⁵ Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978) p.278.

⁶ Edward Thomas, *The South Country* (Dorset: Little Toller Books, 2009) p.104.

⁷ Edward Thomas, *The Ickniel Way* (London: Constable and Company, 1916) p.4.

⁸ Thomas, *The South Country*, p.53.

⁹ Thomas, *Ann. Coll. Poems*, p.126.

never moved to my knowledge',¹⁰ replies the boy. In sympathy with William Hazlitt, he explains how roads almost created themselves simply by men and herds following the lie of the land in harmony with the landscape. He admires John Bunyan for his knowledge of roads: 'This man knew roads', and he admiringly believes that *Pilgrim's Progress* is 'full of the sense of roads'.¹¹

In particular he loved the characteristic winding of old roads that provided the anticipation of a surprise moment of ecstasy around the bend, allowing his imagination to work. Throughout his writings it is these he loves and chooses. 'Why go straight?' he asks, 'There is nothing better at the end of any road than may be found beside it,' and again, emphasising his love of the ancient: 'The connoisseur had something of the savage in him when he demanded a winding road'.¹² William Hazlitt, whom Thomas admired and who shared his love of winding roads, is identified by Lucy Newlyn as being the closest to Thomas in temperament of all the Romantic writers and who shared his Celtic roots and Unitarian background. She explains how their 'interests, outlooks and habits coincided in many respects' and connects their method and love of walking with the Puritan tradition of walking as pilgrimage and self-discovery, which many of Thomas's walks were.¹³ In the same essay she mentions that Thomas enjoyed the 'Hardyesque notion that a particular stretch of road can carry recollections of a man, just as the man does the road'.¹⁴ This feeling of relationship and unity with past generations will be seen to be vitally important to Thomas. Throughout his life he needed to 'belong', to the natural world, to places he lived in, to his circle of friends and especially to Wales, and old roads provided this connection. Robert Macfarlane describes in his introduction to *The South Country*, how for Thomas, 'To step out along them (roads) was to fall spiritually into alignment with the ghosts of previous pedestrians. Footfall as séance'.¹⁵ Thomas had previously denied a thread running through the book, but Macfarlane notes it as the 'idea of the old road'.

In *The Ickniel Way* Thomas traces the origin of these old roads back in history, myth and legend to the Sarn Helen mountain roads of Wales and tells the story of the Emperor Maxen, from the book of the Mabinogion, who dreamed of the beautiful Helen after whom the roads were named and who became his bride. She caused the roads to be made from one castle to another throughout Britain, especially in Wales. Thomas had loved the stories of the Mabinogion from his childhood and the importance of this story to him is demonstrated particularly in his poem, 'Roads' in which one of the verses is, 'Helen of the roads,/ The mountain ways of Wales/ And the Mabinogion tales,/ Is one of the true gods'.¹⁶ This poem also expresses the idea of the interdependence of roads and travellers: 'The hill road wet with rain/ In the sun would not gleam/ Like a winding stream/ If we trod it not again./ And again, showing their humanity: 'They are lonely/ While we sleep,

¹⁰ Thomas, *The Ickniel Way*, p.2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

¹² Thomas, *The Ickniel Way* p.5.

¹³ Lucy Newlyn, 'Hazlitt and Edward Thomas on Walking' *Essays in Criticism*, Vol.56 No. 2(2006)163-185.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.183.

¹⁵ Thomas, *The South Country*, p.10.

¹⁶ Thomas, *Ann.Coll.Poems*, p. 106.

lonelier/ For lack of the traveller/ Who is now a dream only.¹⁷ The same poem also states that for him eventually `All roads lead to France`, presaging his death in the war and introducing the possible idea of that being a goal for him.

Linked to the importance of roads for Thomas is his method of walking along them which is useful in understanding the way he came upon his moments of ecstasy. He, like Jefferies, had a method that was more like wandering, without a goal in mind. Newlyn describes Thomas's love of the word `sauntering` and quotes him using a passage from Henry Thoreau's essay, `Walking` in his book *Horae Solitariae*. In the passage Thoreau says that he had only met one or two people in his life that had the "genius" for sauntering. Newlyn explains how sauntering may appear to be aimless but is really following a course towards an, `un-known, apparently un-planned and mysteriously appropriate destination`.¹⁸ This connects with Thomas's love of coming upon beauty by surprise and finding one of his `moments` unsought but realised, always fleetingly, as a goal when found. His discussion of Jefferies' book, *Bevis*, describes a similar method of walking, in which Thomas cites the example of a grasshopper that is `pretty clearly Jefferies himself`, answering Bevis. Bevis has asked why it doesn't hop straight, "How very stupid you are!" said the grasshopper, "If you go straight, of course you can only see just what is under your feet; but if you go first this way and then that, then you see everything".¹⁹

This is just how Thomas liked to walk, from side to side and in a circle, seeing all the little details. He says in *In Pursuit of Spring*, `I walked haphazard, now to the right, now to the left`.²⁰ Similarly in *The South Country* he is discussing this method and how he preferred to go without maps. If he had one day only for the walk, he went `in a rough circle, trusting by taking a series of turnings to the left or a series to the right, to take much beauty by surprise and to return at last to my starting-point`.²¹ He complained about cycling, the method he used for *In Pursuit of Spring*, that it gave him less possibility of looking at detail especially in misty weather because `You travel too quickly to notice many small things`,²² and the little details of the natural world were what he used most of all in his poems.

The first chapter and most of the second of *The Icknield Way* describe roads and travelling more than any other of his books and also emphasise his possible mysticism. The book echoes with his feeling for roads, especially as living things, a feeling that is `all-but-mystical`, says Trevor Johnson in his introduction to *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*.²³ Describing the road in *The Icknield Way*, Thomas says it is, `a silent companion always ready for us`, `We may go or stay, but the road will go up over the mountains... It is always going: it has never gone right away, and no man is too late`.²⁴ This quasi-mysticism will be discussed more fully in the last

¹⁷ Thomas, *Ann. Coll. Poems*, p. 106.

¹⁸ Lucy Newlyn, "Having no particular Home": Edward Thomas and Sauntering, *Journal of the Friends of the Dymock Poets*, No.5(2006), 19-30 (p.24).

¹⁹ Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, p.163.

²⁰ Edward Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1914) p.74.

²¹ Thomas, *The South Country*, p.21.

²² Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, p.199.

²³ Edward Thomas, *Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Trevor Johnson (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2002)p.xv.

²⁴ Thomas, *The Icknield Way*, p.2.

chapter but one of the main attractions of old roads for Thomas was their `personality`, made up in part by the ghosts of past people who walked them in a continuity of past, present and future. In a Yeatsian phrase he describes, `the sound of their feet and the echoes` being `dead`, but advocates actual contact with the earth, `tread[ing] softly because your way is over men's dreams` and `there is no going so sweet as upon the old dreams of men`.²⁵ In his story, `The Pilgrim`,²⁶ the narrator meets a double of Thomas's, a `would-be` pilgrim, on `Dark Lane`, a section of the Pilgrim's Way coming from St. David's, who demonstrates his belief that `wholeness depends on contact with tradition`. He is doing what the pilgrims did, carving a cross on a stone and trying to become like one of them. He feels their presence and a connection with them while doing what they did and so keeping the tradition alive. The narrator feels himself `absorbed and quieted` by the lane itself, `just for what it was`, not apparently, from any sense of antiquity or thought of pilgrims, but the Thomas double, disturbing him by acting like a pilgrim and carving a cross on stone, reminds him that `what it was` was the way which had been trodden by the feet of pilgrims from generations past and carried their spirits. Obviously, if it had been a newly-made road it could not have been capable of healing in the same way and subconsciously the narrator knew this.

Stan Smith emphasises the fact that in his poetry Thomas's roads and landscapes are `peopled primarily by ghosts, usually associated with memory and the return of the past`.²⁷ However, although the actual people he meets in his prose sometimes appear ghostlike to the extent that they are `strange`, many of them, apart from two philosophers in *The Ickniel Way* who reveal aspects of Thomas's character, are `earthy` and connected to the land, caring for it like farm workers, or travelling over it like tramps, gypsies or pilgrims. There is an ironic example in *The Ickniel Way* of an eighteen-and-a-half stone man, very unlike a ghost, whom Thomas meets in a train when probably on his way to start the walk, who living near, `knew the country all about him` but surprisingly `did not know the Ickniel Way`.²⁸ He also meets a thin woman, gypsy-like with `black hair and wild eyes` living at a remote farm cottage whom he asks for water and with whom he has a strange conversation about food and living in the moon. Nevertheless he describes her as a `human being` for all her wildness.²⁹ Both characters are closely and humorously described but are `marginal` people, perhaps remnants of a different type of agricultural life and Thomas talks to them easily and with apparent pleasure. He felt more at ease with these people than with his literary contemporaries in London because of their shared connection with the earth and the natural world, and their activities and conversation provide interest and often humour in his writings. He had a reverence for the earth that was almost religious but believed, in a reversal of Old Testament doctrine, that `the earth does not belong to man, but man to the earth`,³⁰ and these people would probably have shared this sentiment.

²⁵ Thomas, *The South Country*, p.65-6

²⁶ Thomas, `The Pilgrim` in *The Ship of Swallows*, ed. by Jeremy Hooker (London: Enitharmon, 2005) pp.81-84.

²⁷ Stan Smith, *Edward Thomas* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) p.66.

²⁸ Thomas, *The Ickniel Way*, p. 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.114.

³⁰ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, p. 150.

Nevertheless, Thomas sometimes saw himself, or part of himself, as a ghost. He introduces a `double` into *In Pursuit of Spring*, a man who appears and reappears throughout the narrative and once is described as a `wraith` - a self-distancing that creates ironic humour and allows insight into Thomas's character, making for a much richer narrative. His first meeting with him is whilst sheltering from the rain outside a shop selling birds and fish which Thomas calls, `not a cheerful or a pretty place`.³¹ Wild birds like chaffinches, linnets and finches are imprisoned in small cages battering themselves trying to escape. The `Other Man` as Thomas later calls him, is also sheltering from the rain, and eventually enters the shop and buys a chaffinch. He leaves with an `uncomfortable air and something fluttering in a paper bag such as would hold a penn`orth of sweets`,³² and Thomas follows him on his bicycle. Soon the `liberator of the chaffinch`, as he is then called, lets the bird out of the bag and it flies off gratefully. He does this with an `awkward air` as though embarrassed and it is to be assumed he bought it just to release it as Thomas would have done, or perhaps did.

Andrew Motion expands on Thomas's use of the trope of the Other Man in *In Pursuit of Spring*, stating that Thomas's `original use of the double as a convenient means of objective self-analysis has been transformed into a sinister portrait of the "other tenant" who haunted his mind`.³³ As far as *In Pursuit of Spring* is concerned, this is an exaggeration and the trope is merely playful, but his use of it in *The Ickniel Way* is sinister to some extent. In a passage in this book Thomas is lying awake listening to the rain which at first is `pleasant`, then `majestic` and finally `a terrible thing`.³⁴ He hears words spoken by the `ghostly double` beside him that appears to be accusing him of dropping out of the order of nature; he is `alone` and not part of nature any more, which is a terrible fact for Thomas. He feels guilty and has `chosen death` rather than life. He appears to imagine his death and is `melting into the rain` in what seems to mean annihilation. Eventually he feels himself become one with the rain in an apparently happier and more peaceful, even ecstatic state, welcoming death, and ending with a benediction that he says he used to love and will eventually understand the truth of: "Blessed are the dead that the rain rains on". Even though he feels one with the rain, this is also in a sense a `doubling` as the united Thomas is different from the previously dislocated one. Paradoxically the unity of ecstasy involves `standing outside oneself`.³⁵

Trying to analyse and understand his feelings in this way helped towards some sort of healing and his use of the double in *In Pursuit of Spring*, written later, reveals a healthier frame of mind. Wisniewski rightly states that the presence of the Other Man in this book `also enriches the narrative` by having `some dialogue or comment which would otherwise sound artificial or professorial`.³⁶ The Other Man slips in and out of the narrative, drawing and remarking on weather vanes, pub signs and crosses until his last appearance near the end of the book. This is at Kilve

³¹ Ibid., p. 42.

³² Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, p.43.

³³ Andrew Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991) p. 35.

³⁴ Thomas, *The Ickniel Way*, p. 280-3.

³⁵ Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)p.76.

³⁶ Jacek Wisniewski, *Edward Thomas: A Mirror of England* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009) p.105.

where he explained that he had come there specifically to see whether there was a weather-cock, reminding Thomas of Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers" in which the poet's five-year old son explains his preference for Liswyn over Kilve which doesn't have one.³⁷ There is also an encounter with the Other Man angrily calling Shepton Mallet a "godless place" when the bell was ringing for a church service but no service was held because no congregation came and apparently the "Other Man" and the bell-ringer were unworthy.³⁸ This could be an ironic comment on Thomas's possible feeling about the apparent exclusivity of organised religion.

Writing to his vicar friend, Jesse Berridge, he comments that the Other Man in *In Pursuit of Spring* is "rather a fraud",³⁹ nevertheless, as already seen he obviously portrays aspects of Thomas's character and also adds interest and humour to the narrative. Berridge had accompanied Thomas on part of the journey "on or with a bicycle", as Thomas termed it and the confession no doubt means that he is embarrassed at having used this trope and of revealing so much about the other side of himself. However, the portrayal of the double in the poem, "The Other",⁴⁰ has some sinister overtones. Briefly, Thomas sets the scene by coming out of the forest, "Glad.../ To feel the light, and hear the hum/ Of bees, and the sweet mint", but then feels "fear" because he is asked at an inn if he had not already been there. The double had "pleased them" but he "less", and he is more determined than ever to find him. After a dark period seeking in solitude, in which he nevertheless enjoys a "moment of everlastingness", he eventually catches up with the double and, in a reversal, is confronted by him and asked to defend his actions, but Thomas shamefacedly "said nothing" and "slipped away", perhaps thinking of the Doppelgänger legend that it was considered death to meet your double face to face. Thomas may also have been afraid to face up to some aspects of his hidden self when confronted with them. The poem ends disturbingly with Thomas relentlessly following but not daring to get too close, with "no release/ Until he ceases. Then shall I also cease".

Aside from his local wanderings, which were of temporary help, the only way Thomas was able to really recover his inner unity was to get away on longer walking tours alone in his "homeland" of Wales or the West of England. Writing to his friend Gordon Bottomley in 1908 he says, "Walking you will perhaps see suits me. Really I am never so well as when I am rid of the postman & all company walking 20 or 30 miles a day".⁴¹ In *The Ickniel Way* he quotes Belloc saying that "walking being a primitive act is "natural to man" and as such "we feel restored to a pristine majesty,... when we undertake it", speaking of renewal and recovery. And in the same paragraph, "We walk for a thousand reasons, because we are tired of sitting, because we cannot rest, to get away from towns or to get into them, or because we cannot afford to ride".⁴² Although born in London, Thomas was always glad to get away from it, but he believes the last reason here is perhaps the best as it is the oldest and walking connected him with ancient peoples who walked to work and also simply to get from place to place. Like them, to him walking was "necessary...in

³⁷ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring* p.282.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23

³⁹ Thomas, *Letters to Jesse Berridge* (London: The Enitharmon Press, 1983) p.86.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Ann. Coll. Poems*, p.40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.163

⁴² Thomas, *The Ickniel Way*, p.31.

order both to live and to make a living⁴³, and he undertook much of it because he needed to gather material for his essays, journalistic articles and books. From his teenage years he had written nature essays and articles for publication and later his travel books necessitated travelling the countryside connected with them.

However, in spite of being able to get away and walk, at times his depression increased so much as to become an actual breakdown, and he frequently had suicidal thoughts, at least once going out with a revolver in his pocket to end it all. This episode is described in his story, 'The Attempt'⁴⁴ and shows a premeditated attempt at suicide in which the protagonist deliberately puts a revolver with one cartridge in his pocket when intending to go walking. His wife guesses all and asks him to take his little daughter with him since she knew he would never attempt anything in her company, but he refuses. He feels he is 'called to death' and walks to find a suitably remote spot. Eventually he is interrupted by a man shouting in a wood opposite him and his half-hearted attempt fails.

This severe period continued until 1913 when Thomas wrote to Jesse Berridge: 'My health is now definitely bad, not mere depression-& I don't know how it will develop'.⁴⁵ He had tried all sorts of diets and treatments; at times he had become a teetotaller and cut out tobacco but nothing seemed to work as a cure. Eventually, through friendship with the family of Eleanor Farjeon, he met a doctor called Godwin Baynes who later became a friend and advocate of Carl Jung. Baynes believed in discussion and analysis rather than the strict diets Thomas had been following and encouraged Thomas to talk and write about his problems instead. This seemed to help a great deal for a while, but eventually Thomas stopped seeing him. As he said in a letter to Eleanor Farjeon:

Godwin can't really help me. When he first came to see me he made me feel that I was the most important person in the world to him. As I came to know his world I found he gave the same impression to everybody - and I don't like being one of a crowd.⁴⁶

This was one of the main reasons why Thomas's great friendship with Robert Frost later in 1913 was so important to him, because Frost made him feel valued and unique.

As well as the contact with the earth and its buried spirits through walking, the easing of Thomas's depression and partial healing of his sadness at various times came through direct contact in digging and seed sowing. The Thomases moved to five different houses in the country of Kent and Hampshire, and finally Essex, after the beginning of their marriage in London and Thomas loved working the gardens, sowing seeds, planting, making bonfires and especially digging. One of his finest poems, 'Sowing', was written in response to this enjoyment and admirably demonstrates his feeling for the soil and the moment of ecstatic satisfaction contact with it produced at the end of a day's manual labour working in harmony with nature. Having said that 'It was a perfect day/ For sowing; just/ As sweet and dry

⁴³ Ibid., p. vi.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *The Ship of Swallows* pp. 61-66.

⁴⁵ Thomas, *Letters to Jesse Berridge* p.70.

⁴⁶ Farjeon, p.12

was the ground/ as tobacco-dust, all his senses are involved as he `tasted deep the hour` and listened to `the rain,/ Windless and light, Half a kiss, half a tear,/ Saying good-night`. After he had decided to join the army, Eleanor Farjeon asked him what he was fighting for, and picking up a pinch of earth he said, `Literally, for this`.⁴⁷

His love of nature and the very earth itself was influenced strongly early on by the writings of Richard Jefferies. The similarity of their characters will be discussed in connection with Thomas`s possible mysticism in chapter three, but Jefferies` imperative to `get out of these indoor narrow modern days...into the sunlight and pure wind...where something the ancients called divine can be found and felt there still`, acted in the same way as the impulse of a religion to the young Thomas. He felt it as `a gospel, an incantation`,⁴⁸ freeing him from the shackles of his parents` claustrophobic Sundays when he and his brothers were made to attend church. It also helped him to form a concept of a natural religion springing directly from nature, which he explores in his prose and which will be expanded on in chapter three.

The urge to get out and walk in the countryside was also to escape domestic worries like his financial situation. In his letters he always seemed to be struggling to make ends meet, although there is some suggestion that most of the time he didn`t need to worry. However, he pushed himself to keep working and seeking work all his life and even worked when supposedly on holiday or staying with friends. He often wrote to Helen about the need to be careful with money and managing their financial affairs carefully when he was working away from home, and this was frequently a cause of contention as he felt Helen was not careful enough. His nervous temperament also meant that he found it difficult to work at home with its frequent domestic irritations connected with Helen and the children. He tells his friend Gordon Bottomley in a letter that: `Mervyn (his son) fidgeting is worse than a brass band practising at Chelsea`.⁴⁹ A regular routine suited him best and he was happiest working in his study away from the house or working away altogether.

This was what he was doing in one of his happiest periods while planning the journey for *In Pursuit of Spring*, which he did away from the family in London. It was his last book and critics believe the nearest to poetry. At one point he visualises the road over the downs like a woman, seductive and sensuous. The sense of the feminine was always important to Thomas and is a theme that runs throughout his writing, especially the maternal in connection with his yearning for Wales as his homeland, and also in the wish for a religious experience. His landscapes are often described sexually and at the beginning of this book, after a beautiful light London evening, he imagines the flowing and quiet lines of the Downs that were `an invitation, a temptation`.⁵⁰ This metaphor is used first in *The South Country*, where he describes two roads climbing the Downs as of a `serpentine form` that was `perpetually alluring from afar`.⁵¹ This sexual vision of the road lured him on towards his Eden which in the former book was the area of the Romantic poets, `the

⁴⁷ Farjeon, p.154.

⁴⁸ Thomas, *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, p. 134.

⁴⁹ Edward Thomas *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, ed. by R. George Thomas (London:O.U.P. 1968) p.68.

⁵⁰ Thomas *In Pursuit of Spring* p. 21.

⁵¹ Thomas *The South Country* p.179.

nightingale's song, the apple blossom, the perfume of sunny earth⁵² and most importantly, a view of Wales. He looks back to beautiful Easters in the past when the chiffchaff was singing on March 20 in a soft wind, and in typical Thomas style wants to recreate the past and make it the present and start his quest to find Spring immediately.

Unlike the happier quest for Spring, Thomas felt himself in metaphorical darkness when tracing the Ickniel Way because he was trying to find the course of the ancient and original way when this had not been properly or completely mapped. He had nothing to guide him in finding the road apart from old maps and documents and hints from people along the way that were very often misleading, and he frequently found two ways which could each have been the original one. Stan Smith calls *The Ickniel Way* 'one of Edward Thomas's most dispirited books, written from necessity alone'.⁵³ It is true that there are one or two passages in which his depression shows but even these add interest and subtle humour and the greater part is lyrically written, making it a compelling and interesting book.

Ford Madox Ford and Edward Thomas by Robert Gomme

Ford and Thomas were both born in the 1870s (Ford 1873 and Thomas 1878). They eked out a living as writers in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods and both in middle age voluntarily enlisted in the army in World War I. Both fought in France. Ford, in spite of near death in action, went on to write 'Parades End' and many other works before his death in 1939. Thomas was killed in action in 1917 bequeathing to us his immortal poetry, nearly all written late in life while in khaki.

Their backgrounds, however, could not have been different. Although Ford did not go to university, as Thomas did, he was compensated by his upbringing. Although his father, Dr. Hueffer, *The Times* music critic, died young, his grandfather, the artist Madox Brown, brought up Ford and his younger brother, Oliver. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti were their uncle and aunt and the family moved in artistic and literary circles, which included Swinburne, Watts-Dunton and Holman Hunt. Thomas was born in the London suburb of Lambeth, south of the Thames, and later moved with his parents further, to Clapham. He went to local Grammar schools and won a scholarship to Lincoln College, Oxford. His father was a minor Civil Servant who was anxious for his son to follow in his career, but even as a student Thomas had already embarked on a life based in literature.

Writers in the thirty or forty years before 1914 were busy. In that period the market for printed material widened and deepened as population increased and literacy grew. It is claimed that there were up to some four hundred separate publishing houses at their peak in this period. The number of newspapers rose from about 1,600 in 1875 to about 2,500 in the 1900s and the numbers of weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines rose from nearly 650 in 1875 to some 2,500 in 1903. In

⁵² Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*. p.21.

⁵³ Smith, p.62.

response, the number of those describing themselves as 'author, editor, writer, and journalist' totalled 2,400 in the 1871 census rising to nearly 13,800 in 1911. But as we know the amount written was not a guide to prosperity; like many others, Hueffer and Thomas had to struggle to earn a living. For example, in a letter to his friend Ian MacAlister on 29 October 1901, Thomas mentioned that 'the 'Globe' and 'Pall Mall' between them have rejected 8 articles in a fortnight.'

In the same period, interest in the countryside and concern about its future grew. The growth of suburbia was there to be seen and as Max Saunders has commented 'There was an Edwardian preoccupation with a folk culture that was perceived to be rapidly disappearing'. Hueffer's, *The Heart of the Country* and Thomas's *The Heart of England*, for example, both came out in 1906. In practical terms too, we see the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the National Footpaths Preservation Society (1884), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (1889), the National Trust (1895), *Country Life* (1897), the *Survey of London* and the *Victoria History of the Counties of England* (both 1900). In music, Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams and many other followers collected folk songs and Alice Bertha Gomme collected some eight hundred children's and folk games published as *The Traditional Games of England Scotland and Ireland* (Two Volumes 1894 and 1898).

Ford and Thomas probably came to know one another in 1905 or 1906, perhaps earlier. Writers generally met and gossiped. It would be strange if they did not. Clubs of varying sorts flourished, including a number of literary ones such as *Whitefriars Chronicle*. There were lunch parties too. A group of writers, for example, met at weekly lunch gatherings at a Soho restaurant where Ford and Thomas met others such as Belloc, Chesterton, W.H. Davies and Scott-James and less frequently, perhaps, Galsworthy and W.H. Hudson.

Thomas was a skilful and prolific reviewer and an appropriate commentator on Ford's publications. There are six reviews mentioned in Thomas's checklist, but three cannot be located at present. This leaves us with one review each in *The Speaker*, *The Bookman* and *The Morning Post* but given his views it seems unlikely that Thomas would take a different line elsewhere.

In *The Speaker* of 3rd June 1905 Thomas reviewed *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City* (Alston Rivers 5s net) Thomas quotes Hueffer 'We are all of us who are Londoners, paying visits to a personality that, whether we love it or very cordially hate it, fascinates us all'. 'His method is', Thomas writes, 'roughly to record a score, perhaps a hundred, of the impressions, which make on different people...(and) in two hundred small pages he suggests...history, pictures, episodes, emotions...many will find...things that are remembered...but also providing the sense of a horizon, of something beyond'. He writes with a 'high level of precision and effectiveness, and its brief phrases leave... echoes in the mind'. Nevertheless Thomas feels that the book tries to include too much, even if 'Mr. Hueffer's myriad minded method and achievement compel us with gratitude and with little regret to admit their superiority...the little book is almost as complex as London itself'.

Thomas reviewed Hueffer's *The Heart of the Country* in the June 1906 issue of *The Bookman*. The book was popular and was widely reviewed, including in addition to Thomas, Robert Lynd, Edward Garnett, and C.F.G. Masterman. Thomas notes that his first chapter headed 'The Country of the Townsman' is a very acute and spiritual expression of what the country means to those who...seek or desire in the

country...He has read 'many works dealing with rural questions'. He produces 'highly charged and concentrated chapters... and he has, we suppose, hunted and farmed and fished and driven and sauntered and toured: he has owned land and employed labourers; he has talked with landowners, farmers, parsons, shepherds, carriers, hop pickers, ploughmen, tramps and their wives; and he has haunted inns and fairs and sales. He has travelled over large tracts of the south and middle of England, northward to Carlisle, but excluded most of Yorkshire. And his experience has left in his mind the most strangely different thoughts and pictures and dreams. The result is a book in the same class and scope as *The Soul of London*, that delicate epitome of emotion and fact'. Thomas concludes by making two points. Firstly, 'a great deal of the country, fields and roads and houses and men and women, have got onto paper in a pleasant and arresting manner by means of much precise detail and ample atmosphere and reflection. In the second place, and almost invariably interwoven in a pleasant way...is the mind of an interesting contemporary, selecting, combining, saturating them and, of course, explaining the omissions which might be expected in a book of only two hundred pages. And since this contemporary frankly touches, with a style which is full of experience and sympathy, upon the agricultural, social and psychological questions which naturally arise out of his subject, and since he is always fresh and sincere, and often surprising, his book makes a fine and wide appeal, which only his indifference to conventional estimates of the country and country things can frustrate'.

In 1910, Hueffer's *Songs from London* was published by Elkin Matthews at 1/- . Thomas's review appeared in the *Morning Post* of 12 May 1910, which coincided with the news of the death of King Edward VII. Many pages were occupied with the king's death, but there seems to have been no disturbance in Thomas's piece. Hueffer's new slim book contained fourteen poems in thirty pages and Thomas commented 'that even so the poems were so different as to be unrecognised by the same author...his 'versatility (was) brilliant and as surprising in verse as in prose...his dramatic lyrics'. 'A score of poems in as many sorts by a very brilliant and ingenious mind', wrote Thomas. 'The poems have in common a movement such as befits a song meant to be sung and a powerful effort showing freedom and directness' 'Of poetic clothing', Thomas asserts, 'there is nothing and at least half of the poems are not of the substance which is superficially poetic'.

As an example Thomas quotes *The Dream Hunt*

My lady rides a-hunting
 Upon a dapple grey:
 Six trumpeters they ride behind
 Six prickers clear the way.

And when she climbs the hill sides
 The Hunt cries: "Ho! La! Lo!"
 And when she trails along the dales
 The merry horns do blow.

And so in summer weather,
 Before the heat of day,
 My darling takes all eyes and breaks

My heart and makes away.

As contrast Thomas offers *Club Night* as for example (verse 1)

There was an old man had a broken hat,
 He had a crooked leg, an old tame cat,
 An old lame horse that cropped along the hedge,
 And an old song that set your teeth on edge
 With words like:

'Club night's come; it's time the dance begins.
 Up go the lamps, we've all got nimble shins...

Thomas was also taken by *Finchley Road* later known as *Castles in the Fog*.

As we come up at Baker Street
 Where tubes and trains and buses meet
 There's a touch of fog and a touch of sleet;
 And we go on up Hampstead way
 Towards the closing in of day...

You should be a queen or a duchess rather,
 Reigning in place of a warlike father
 In peaceful times o'er a tiny town
 Where all the roads wind up and down
 From your little palace - a small old place
 Where every soul should know your face
 And bless your coming. That's what I mean,
 A small grand-duchess, no distant queen,
 Lost in a great land, sitting alone
 In a marble palace upon a throne

.....

But here we are in the Finchley Road
 With a drizzling rain and a skidding bus
 And the twilight settling down on us.

Thomas also reviewed 'In Arcady and Out' by Hueffer's brother, Oliver, published on 21 May 1901. While Thomas admired Hueffer's work, his reaction to that of Oliver's is the reverse. Thomas begins ironically by stating that 'Mr. Hueffer has undoubtedly been in Arcady. So have very many of us. Along with a million others he wishes to be back in Arcady, and in a shrill voice he cries for it. We think however that the manners of that blissful place are still largely unknown to him or they would have somewhat softened his speech...one of the society for organising a return to nature (but) such societies are not infallible...the voice too often like a reed bending in the wind. He meets few people...(but) the nymphs are exploring the deserted factory and Mr. Hueffer describes them 'measuring their tiny feet against the huge

imprints that hobnailed boots and wooden clogs had left behind them'. It is not, however, very often that Mr. Hueffer has the patience to produce such effects. He wastes language, and we venture to suggest that if Mr. Hueffer followed a nearly moral maxim, counting ten before he put each sentence on paper, he might be more successful'.

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Robert Gomme, 14 February 2013

Norman Douglas and Edward Thomas, a Curious Friendship

On the face of things, Norman Douglas and Edward Thomas had little in common, indeed, in his entertaining and unusually revelatory book of selected memoirs *Looking Back*, Douglas says of Thomas: "There was something of the Byzantine angel about him; ethereal, refined, aloof. Thomas was so austere in the matter of food and drink, so conscientious, so incurably monogamous, that, differing fundamentally from each other, we agreed perfectly." That well known passage is no less than truth, and the couple of pages that follow it are among the best descriptions of Thomas by one who knew him, albeit for only a few years from about 1912 to 1916. The description, both detached and affectionate, contains none of the supercharged emotionalism of some of the other accounts by his friends.

Douglas came from a privileged and relatively wealthy background, from a family famous and notorious since medieval times in lowland Scotland, which included Black Douglas, the Douglas of Chevy Chace and Wilde's nemesis the Marquis of Queensbury. His own father became Laird of Tilquihillie, but lived chiefly in the Vorarlberg where he owned and managed a factory. Douglas was brought up therefore chiefly in Austria, whence came his deep love of the mountains, their flora and fauna, of walking and climbing, and partly in Britain, whose climate, food and schools he quickly came to loathe. He wasn't too keen on its people either- particularly his relations. Following considerable agitation from him he was removed from school at Uppingham to Karlsruhe, where most of his secondary education took place. Karlsruhe encouraged his interest in science and equally in sex. It was probably here that his adoption of hedonism as a creed and toleration of just about all human behaviour took root. It was also when he started writing. His early works were short and scientific, *On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden* for instance, a title that gives no hint of his later fiction or travel writing.

Removing himself from the British Foreign Service in St. Petersburg on account of making a lady connected to the Imperial Court pregnant, Douglas, who

had married his first cousin in 1898, settled in Italy on the Sorrentine coast with a comfortable private income. He continued his scientific researches and had two sons by the wife. The family travelled widely, but his wife, whom he had treated abominably, and he were divorced, Douglas keeping custody of his sons. By this time he had changed his sexual preferences from heterosexuality to pederasty, although he never lost all interest in women. Despite the easy-going morality of the Neapolitans, pederasty, which was illegal, led to scrapes, and it was not unusual for him to 'hop it' as he used to describe it, when things got too hot and police and furious parents became unmanageable or unbribeable.

Hedonism tends to be expensive and when the family business was sold Douglas was left with little or no income. The sudden change of fortune caused him to look for a job and he became Assistant Editor of *The English Review* under Austin Harrison. He met Thomas at this time, introduced by Edward Garnett. In late 1916 he 'hopped it' from England to avoid a court case and returned to Italy, a trip he later wrote about in *Alone*, but it was the novel *South Wind* published in 1917 that ensured his fame. It is the book that expresses his beliefs most explicitly. *Alone* is discursive, describing apparently random journeys, sojourns, memories and musings. There are some similarities to books such as *In Pursuit of Spring* which Douglas might well have read.

After the war Douglas lived more or less in exile, only returning to Britain from 1942 to 1946, driven here by the Second World War. The description of Thomas in *Looking Back* makes quite clear what he thought of war in general and Thomas's death in particular. "Why were such charming and valuable men like these (Thomas and Philip Baynes, an artist,) not provided with safe jobs after the fashion of so many thousand gutter-snipes who went through the War and are still with us? The Survival of the Unfittest..." Douglas died on Capri in 1952, and it is said that his last words, perpetuating a lifelong hostility towards organised religion were "Get those f..... nuns away from me."

This is an extremely brief resumé of Douglas's complicated life and many members will know more about the man, but it is, I hope, sufficient to show how very different he was from Thomas. Picking up a handful of soil when asked why he had decided to enlist and saying, "Literally for this", as Eleanor Farjeon stated that Thomas had done was clearly not Douglas's way. "The business of life is to enjoy oneself; everything else is a mockery" proclaimed Douglas in *Late Harvest*. Thomas might just have envied Douglas this blithe philosophy but would never have followed it. Again, in an inscription to a friend on the fly leaf of a copy of *Old Calabria* Douglas wrote "Always do what you please, and send everyone to Hell, and take the consequences. Damned Good Rule of Life". Thomas might have toyed with this idea when things were especially difficult and his life seemed nothing but a chore, but he never did, nor could have, followed that line himself. It is certainly difficult to conceive of Thomas getting in and out of legal and sexual scrapes by 'hopping it.' It is impossible to imagine Thomas publishing *Some Limericks*, one of the most obscene books ever produced, made funny less by the limericks themselves, than by the cod academic notes that accompany them. Yet it is possible to think that Thomas would have found them funny.

Despite the obvious differences the two men became firm friends, even to the extent, according to Douglas of planning to open a village general store together. Thomas was to find suitable premises, while Douglas was to raise the capital. At this

he failed and the business partnership was never started. Similarly, an invitation from Douglas that Thomas should visit him in Calabria could not be taken up because of the demands of Thomas's work. What changes might have been wrought in Thomas had he accepted! For a few years they were close: they would drink together in London, and Thomas invited Douglas to spend Christmas in Steep, although that too did not happen.

Similarities between the two men exist. Douglas often claimed to be unmoved by, or uninterested in, poetry, but in fact he was a shrewd critic. Other than Thomas, he was one of the few critics to recognise Robert Frost's qualities when he reviewed *North of Boston*. He also saw the weaknesses in Rupert Brooke's poetry when compared to Thomas's, although he also wrote admiringly of Brooke's potential, never to be realised. He was able to attend the unveiling of Brooke's tombstone on Skyros in 1920.

One of the closest areas of agreement between the two men was in their view of travel writing. Douglas believed that the reader deserved more than a straightforward description of places, scenery, plants and animals, and that travel literature should include an interior dimension: musings, sentiments, an interior voyage. This view is explicit in his own writing, especially in *Old Calabria, Alone and Together*, and it is also a fairly exact description of Thomas's travel writing: *The Ickniel Way* and *In Pursuit of Spring* for instance. The books are travels of the mind, spirit and character, as well as geographical travels. The two men were treading parallel paths, and indeed set the pattern for the majority of travel writers of the twentieth century. In style too there were similarities between the two men, as is suggested by Douglas's support of Robert Frost's verse. By contrast Douglas's prose never showed the extreme Nineties elements that can be found in Thomas's early work, largely perhaps because his upbringing was more cosmopolitan. Both men were strongly attracted by the power and history of words however, as Thomas's poem 'Words' illustrates. Douglas put his belief into prose: 'An English word is no fossil to be locked up in a cabinet, but a living thing, liable to the fate of all such things. Glance back into Chaucer and note how they have thriven on their own merits... thriven or perished, or put on new faces.' Their often ironic humour is also similar, more obvious perhaps in Douglas, but there are differences: with Douglas the reader always senses that he is being talked to by a patrician- a friendly and approachable one certainly, but nevertheless a patrician. This is an element alien to Thomas's prose.

Both Douglas and Thomas use words as sources of pleasure: words are part of the party and have a history, a sound and meanings. They both used the phrase 'English words', and both men's respect for and enjoyment of words is much the same. Precision of language is common to both men, whether when Douglas is describing an alpine plant, bird or remote view, or Thomas is observing the flora of Hampshire and the birds to be heard on a London common. Unlike Thomas however, Douglas has no sense of 'the other'. When he mentions someone accompanying him, the reader can be certain that it is a person of flesh and blood: the 'ethereal' quality he found in Thomas is with him entirely lacking.

Walking was an imperative for both men. With Douglas it was normally continental with the Vorarlberg as a particular enjoyment, where he could climb mountains as well as walk in the more circumscribed English sense. While he had some affection for the West Country and for Wales, he affected disdain for the

British countryside. This was partly no doubt because of his largely Austrian upbringing, but also because of British weather, the association of Scotland with relations who he disliked, and especially because of its 'limitations' as he put it in his remark on Jefferies. Thomas by contrast felt the history of each English field he traversed: he saw in his mind's eye the generations of ploughmen who had worked it and the harvest gangs reaping the ripe corn. Douglas too was interested in history, in particular classical history, but somewhat indifferent to that type of interest. Whilst he was just as likely to befriend ploughmen as Thomas, it would not have occurred to him to write such a poem as 'As the team's headbrass...'

Once Douglas had lost his private income, he had money worries in common with Thomas; he was more or less always in need of funds, but unlike Thomas was able often to live reasonably well thanks to the kindness of friends and living in countries whose currency exchange worked in favour of sterling.

To say that both men had an interest in children is to run the danger of being misinterpreted, especially given the sensitivities surrounding the matter nowadays. Unlike Douglas, Thomas without doubt felt no sexual attraction to them. Douglas was certainly a pederast but his interest went well beyond that. He might groom children, often with the connivance of their parents, but he also held a deep belief in the inherent wisdom of children, and understood that adults could learn much from children and their attitude to life. It is perhaps in this respect that his and Thomas's views overlapped. Poems such as 'The Mill Pond' and 'Old Man' are about children, in those cases his 'daughter the younger' as well as being about the poet. It is the child that sets him thinking. Douglas's book *London Street Games*, which Peter and Iona Opie drew on heavily for their work on children, would have appealed to Thomas with his interest in folksong and what might be called 'working class culture'. The chapter 'Meadowlands' in *The Heart of England* demonstrates Thomas's similar interest in children's songs and games.' The well-known story of Thomas continuing to fish with the son of a friend with sticks as rods but no hooks or bait is an illustration of how he would not destroy the magic of the moment that the boy felt. James Guthrie tells of Thomas's popularity with his children, while in *Four-and-Twenty-Blackbirds*, the stories show an appreciation of the ways children think.

Despite the darker side of Douglas's interest, he also looked after many of the children he had probably abused, advising them and helping them financially and in many other ways, especially after they married and settled down. Many stayed in touch with him for years and appreciated his kindness and generosity to them. He was a far more complex character than a straightforward paedophile. Children might not have been as important to Thomas, but both men admired their logical, straightforward approach to life, often combined with a strong and untrammelled imagination.

Like Thomas, Douglas inspired great friendship and loyalty from a wide range of people, in Douglas's case from wealthy and not so wealthy men and women of the world of many nationalities and classes (one of his closest friends was Faith Mackenzie, wife of Compton Mackenzie another friend). Those loyal to Thomas came from a narrower range of society because his life was narrower, but unlike Douglas he did not arouse feelings of dislike, amounting at times to hatred as well. The two men whatever their differences were clearly at ease with each other, sitting in a Charlotte Street pub drinking beer together, and their views on modern literature were surprisingly similar. In their own writing they are also surprisingly

similar in approach and precision. It is curious that two men of such different background, moral and ethical standards should have found so much in common. Historical 'ifs' are not meaningful but can be fun, and it is intriguing to consider what paths Thomas might have taken had he not been a family man at such a young age. Perhaps he would have gone to Calabria and travelled on the continent as much as he did the byways of England. That would have affected his writing.

This has been a brief gallop through the association between the two men. Should anyone who has read this far wish to investigate further, the correspondence between Douglas and Thomas is held in the Yale University archive with some at UCLA. Apart from *South Wind*, Douglas's books are like Thomas's in being difficult to find, especially the early scientific papers. Fortunately, he both commented on and recycled extracts from his work in *Late Harvest*, which is the easiest title to find. It also includes some very funny reviews of romantic novels. It is not difficult to visualise Thomas and Douglas in fits of laughter as they discussed these, which have some of the characteristics of Thomas's review of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's verse. *Alone, Together* and *Old Calabria* have been mentioned and to those can be added *Siren Land* and *Fountains in the Sand* as being travel books with resemblances to Thomas's work. There are also angry squibs such as *How About Europe* and *D. H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus*. Above all, *Looking Back* tells more about the man that he wished people to know than any other book by him and has a remarkable opening that writers of more ordinary memoirs might consider with advantage. Nancy Cunard wrote *Grand Man*, a paean to their friendship, while Richard Aldington wrote a bitter attack entitled *Pinorman*. A thorough biography of Douglas is *Norman Douglas, A Biography* by Mark Holloway, published by Secker and Warburg in 1976. The English Review includes many articles by Douglas written during his period with that journal.

Richard Emeny
June 2013

Note: most of the quotations from Douglas's work are taken from *An Almanac*, a collection of his views published in 1945 by Chatto and Windus. The following taken from that book and *Late Harvest* might well have been enjoyed by Thomas:

When people cease to reflect, they become idealists.

Our reverence for inspired idiots: has it never struck you?

What is all wisdom save a collection of platitudes?

Machine ages have no use for an aesthetic sense.

Distrust of authority should be the first civic duty.

If one has enjoyed life and contrived to extract matter of mirth even out of its not infrequent mishaps, one cannot be said to have squandered one's days.

Works and Earthworks by Terry Lloyd

Three writers are associated with the GWR railway works in Swindon and with Liddington Castle, the Bronze Age earthworks situated five miles to the south east; namely (John) Richard Jefferies, (Owen) Alfred Williams and (Philip) Edward Thomas; all three being known by their second rather than their first fore-name. Jefferies was born in 1848, thirty years before Williams and Thomas, and all had their lives cut short; Richard Jefferies contracted TB in his youth and died aged 38; Alfred Williams lived a life of poverty and was 'worn out' at 53; while Edward Thomas died in the First World War aged 39.

At times their writings reinforced their background similarities, but at other times they viewed things quite differently. Jefferies saw the railway works through the eyes of a wondering visitor, overwhelmed by what he saw, and he painted a somewhat romanticised view of life 'inside', as Swindonians termed it.

"The largest [steam-hammer] descends with the force of seventy tons, yet so delicate is the machinery that visitors are shown how the same ponderous mass of metal and the same irresistible might can be so gently administered as to crush the shell of a nut without injuring the kernel. . . . Hissing, with small puffs of white steam curling stealthily upwards they [the boilers] resemble a group of volcanoes on the eve of an eruption. This place presents a wonderful and even terrible aspect at night, when the rail-mill and steam hammers are in full swing."¹

Williams worked at the steam-hammers for twenty three years until ill health forced him to stop, nevertheless he shared the same romantic view. In *Life in a Railway Factory*, the book for which he is best remembered, he says:

"The steam-hammers, both by their noise, speed, and visible power and by the alertness and dexterity of the stampers and forgers, are certain to compel attention. There is a great fascination, too, in standing near the furnace and watching the sparkling, hissing mass of metal being withdrawn by the crane, or seeing the heated bars removed from the oil forge and clapped quickly on the steel dies to be beaten into shape."²

However, the two men draw quite different conclusions. Jefferies saw the factory life improving the lot of the working man.

"this small nation of workers, this army of hammer, lathe, and drill, affords a matter for deep meditation in its sociological aspect. Though so numerous that no one of them can be personally acquainted with more than a fractional part, yet there is a strong *esprit de corps*, a spirit that ascends to the highest among them."³

On the other hand, Williams the insider, saw tensions rather than a common spirit; between countryman and town dweller, supervisor and worker, and an antipathy to

educated workers. This last point was particularly painful for Williams, who, while working as a hammerman, rose at 4am and retired at midnight in order to teach himself Greek and Latin and read books of literature.

“It is superfluous to say, moreover, that the cleverest man is not the one usually advanced; that would be contrary to all precedent at the factory. He is more usually the very individual to be kept under; the foreman will be sure to keep him in the background and hide his light underneath the bushel, or try his best to snuff it out altogether.”⁴

It is not surprising that although Williams’ book of a railwayman’s life received good reviews in the national press, the GWR Magazine disliked it and accused him of being a bitter man whose heart was really in the countryside. It did not find favour in Swindon either, for in 1921, six years after its publication, Williams confided to a friend that fewer than a dozen copies had been sold in the town.

Edward Thomas probably never saw the inside of the Works, but knew it as the builder of engines that stop ‘unwontedly’, and as the employer of his relations, whom he delighted to visit as a boy.

“My aunt was an attendant in the refreshment bar, and sometimes gave me a cake or sandwich to eat. . . My uncle was a fitter in the Great Western railway works and knew everybody. He was tall easy-going, and had a pipe in his mouth and very likely a dog at his heels. I was proud to be with him as he nodded to the one-legged signalman and the man with a white apron and a long hammer for tapping the wheels of all the carriages.”⁵

Liddington Hill, with its ancient earthworks visible for many miles to the north and east, was an icon for all three authors. Williams could see it from his home in South Marston and from the Works.

“There is one point, and only one, a few paces west of the [steam-hammer] shed, from which an inspiring view may be had. There on a fine day, from between two towering walls, in the little distance, blue almost as the sky, may be seen a great part of Liddington Hill, crowned with the *castellum*, the scene of many a contest in prehistoric days, and the holy of holies of Richard Jefferies, who spent days and nights there trying to fathom the supreme mystery that has baffled so many great and ardent souls.”⁶

Williams recognised that for Jefferies, Liddington was a mystical place that needed time to give up its secrets; time that the hard-working Williams lacked, but which the dreamer Jefferies possessed in abundance.

“Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the time I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. There was

an entrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover my breath.”⁷

“This deep fosse gives a pleasant slope to recline on, every motion of the arm resting upon it presses out an exquisite bouquet: and is not the delicate flower itself lovely to look upon? Let the head rest then, bury the face in this pillow of Nature, extend the limbs, and forgetting the dusty struggle of the wearied cities, breathe in as it were the very spirit, the magnetism of the grand old Earth”⁸

When Thomas described the land around Liddington in his biography of Jefferies, he employed similar mystical imagery.

“The road from Baydon to Aldbourne is notable for its passage through one of the finest hollows in the downs. The unbroken undulations are long, and the mind floats with them and sleeps in the melody which they make: there is grass, mangolds, wheat in leaning shocks, solid beech clusters, and, far away, on the edge of the bowl, Liddington clump;”⁹

The authors’ friends and admirers signalled the importance of Liddington and the down lands around it by using sarsen stones from the area to carry their memorials. At the instigation of Rowland Watson, a four ton stone was taken from near Avebury and erected on the Shoulder of Mutton hillside near Steep in October 1937 in memory of Edward Thomas. The stone bears his words: “And I rose up and knew I was tired and I continued my journey.”

Two years later, J. B. Jones of Swindon had a similar memorial erected to the two local writers, after canvassing the support of national figures that included Neville Chamberlain and John Betjeman. He wanted to place the memorial on Liddington Hill itself, but there was local opposition and he had to settle for an out of the way spot, site three miles away, on Burderop down alongside a rather mean row of firs which Edward Thomas had once called “a long, thin line of trees that seem Titanic wayfarers trooping dejectedly”¹⁰. As with the Thomas memorial, the memorial contains extracts from their writings. For Jefferies: “It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine.” For Williams: “Still to find and still to follow, joy in every hill and hollow. Company in solitude.”

There is one final possible connection between the three writers. Although Williams devoured all of Jefferies’ writings over a short period of time, and was much influenced by them, he came to them quite late in his life, which he himself found surprising. He describes the circumstance in *In a Wiltshire Village, 1912*.

“Richard Jefferies, the great Nature-writer, of whom, peculiarly enough, I had never heard of till a few years ago, and none of whose writings I had seen until I was several years past thirty [32 actually]. Then by chance a new friend, a Londoner, an enthusiastic admirer of Jefferies, and a poet, sent me one of his books to read [*The Story of My Heart*], and introduced me to that wonderful personality who was born, and who lived, in such close proximity to the village [South Marston]. The world and especially this corner of it, has

not been quite the same to me since, it is a fuller and richer, more wildly and riotously beautiful than ever.”¹¹

Although Williams wrote those words in 1912, two years before Thomas started writing poetry, and although I have no evidence to support it, I want to believe that Edward Thomas was that ‘Londoner’ who introduced him to Richard Jefferies and thereby tighten the bonds between the three of them. Thomas certainly knew of Williams, for in *A Literary Pilgrim in England*, he wrote: “But in his [RJ’s] home-country we are in a spirit-land; not even M. Alfred Williams’s delightful gleanings from the same fields in the vale of White Horse convince us to the contrary.”¹²

Jefferies led the way in showing the beauty of the commonplace. Alfred Williams used this inspiration to bring to life the harsh life in the Works, and in the humble villages around it. He is known as the Hammerman poet, but it is his prose which endures, by recording a way of life that has gone forever; the Works are now a shopping mall and eight year olds are no longer taken out of school to work in the fields as Williams was. Meanwhile it is left to Edward Thomas, who for most of his life wrote prose, to carry Jefferies’ banner in verse. In a few short lines he captures the land and the lives of man and beast upon it. Take for instance his poem, *the Combe*, describing a very distinctive feature of the Liddington countryside.

“The Combe was ever dark, ancient and dark.
Its mouth stopped with bramble, thorn and briar;
And no one scrambles over the sliding chalk
By beech and yew and perishing juniper
Down the half precipices of its sides, with roots
And rabbit holes for steps. The sun of Winter,
The moon of Summer, and all the singing birds
Except the missel-thrush that loves juniper,
Are quite shut out. But far more ancient and dark
The Combe looks since they killed the badger there,
Dug him out and gave him to the hounds,
That most ancient Briton of English beasts.”¹³

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Steep

for Edward Thomas

by Matthew Oates

Only in time, for there is always time, between
 The showers that skim the leaf-unfurling green,
 As rainbow-hailed the land slow dries,
 And sends to dance again the hoverflies,
 Or stills the storm cock bird, who rings his song
 In the temple of the stilled winds, and belongs
 Just there - where the Weald stretches out its clay,
 To greet a vagrant swallow, arrived today,
 As if to say, you have returned, from France,
 Perhaps, or some place safe from distance
 To your heartland, where the woods hang down
 Their heads to greet one who wears a poet's crown,
 Who drifts, as sallow seed, somewhere above
 The yew tree slopes that bore your steeping love.

In Lutcombe, where wood forget-me-nots
 Hide in shade as spring's leafing sudden stops;
 Up Wheatham Hill, where the beech cathedral
 Rallies a faithless faithful with a cuckoo call;
 Down Honeycritch Lane, as youth out courting
 Lingers, while the snickering of bats begins;
 In Happersnapper, where autumn vapours hang
 In misted drifts of sodden leaf mould rain;
 On Shoulder of Mutton's thyme-stained down
 Where you would rest on June days, bygone,
 So long bygone, but choose one moment -
 Choose any moment to begin, again, re-sent
 As one restored to life by the poetry of love,
 Bidden by the calling of some hidden turtle dove.

For here, between the pigeon's breasting dive
 And spring's unravelling of dandelion lives,
 Or the flashing of iridescent time on insect wings
 High in the oaks, as July wanes its evenings;
 Just here, within the moments of memory,
 We can choose our moments, and simply be,
 Even as you, as distant blue smoke rising
 From a Wealden charcoal fire, an accident of time,

Or as the striking moment, when sunlight muddles
From a mirror masquerading as a puddle;
Or in footprints of children's laughter, imprinted
In the mud, the dust, of time, indented.
Remember! For it is written so, and right,
Within the lucidity of light and twilight.

For you found in Nature here, the words of life,
Gave them shape, released them, into the narrative
Of memory, then marched off east-away,
To the chalky mud of khaki France, away
From a formless war within your mind,
Beyond summer's haze, in tears of autumn rain,
Or in pursuit of spring, as the seasons lied
Within a soul confused by mere humanity,
That pondered what is meant by God, or love,
When all around some spirit subtly wove
The wonder that you saw, breathed and conveyed,
And offered truth, unbroken and unmade,
And formed perfect into eternal words
The messages you thought were yours.

So you acted out your ministry, perhaps unwittingly,
Not knowing it for what it was, and ever yet may be;
You took Nature's meaning in your hands,
Blessed it into words, loosed it upon this land,
And you said one morning, on waking from a dream:
'Somehow, some day, I shall be here again'.

Matthew Oates
March 2013

Other News

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>.

Edward Thomas, *Selected Poems and Prose*, published by Penguin Classics at £9.99, is a reprint of Penguin's 1999 publication, but with a new foreword taken from *The Old Ways* by Robert Macfarlane. It is a handy volume with extracts from letters, books, approximately a hundred of the poems and is an effective introduction for a newcomer to Thomas. For those who have found it difficult to obtain the prose works, there is a wide representation of them from both early and late books.

The notecards are still available. The four series of wood engravings and accompanying poems and prose extracts marry well. They can be obtained from either Heather Cobby at Brightshill Cottage, May Hill, Longhope, Glos., GL17 0NJ, or from Lucy Milner at The Barn, 2 Park Farm Court, Titchmarsh, Northants., NN14 3BP. Price including postage: £4.00 per pack or £2.20 per pack for ten packs or more.

The Cyder Press titles are still available on line from the University of Gloucestershire, by post from the University at The Cyder Press, Department of Humanities, University of Gloucestershire, Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, GL50 4AZ or from Richard Emeny, Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 6NQ, telephone: 01278 662856, email: remeny@halswell.fsnet.co.uk. The titles most likely to be of interest to members are: Edward Thomas: *The Country, Keats, Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds, Edward Thomas on Thomas Hardy* and *Edward Thomas on the Georgians*. Books by Robert Frost: *North of Boston* (includes Thomas's reviews and *As Told to a Child*, which is a fine art edition at £25.00. There is also an illustrated edition of *Come Christmas* by Eleanor Farjeon. Their prices are £5.00 or £7.50 for the longer editions plus postage. Some are facsimiles of the original books and some are reprints. They represent an inexpensive way of acquiring some of the texts that are difficult to find.

Octopus Press in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum will publish in 2014, as one of doubtless many commemorative ventures for the First World War centenary, a book in the same vein as '100 objects that made the world', this one being '100 objects that made the First World War'. It will include Edward Thomas's War Diary.

'**Adlestrop**' appears in an anthology of the poetry of trains, published by Faber.

Available are a limited number of programmes of the **Memorial Recital of Words and Music for Jill Balcon**, which took place at the Wigmore Hall on 20th March 2010. If you would like one, please contact Richard Emeny, Melrose House, 4 High Street, North Petherton, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 6NQ, telephone: 01278 662856, email: remeny@halswell.fsnet.co.uk.

In March 1993 **Mary Wynn-Jones**, a Fellowship member and Edward Thomas devotee, decided to repeat Edward's bicycle ride recorded in *In Pursuit of Spring* staying in the same places on the same dates exactly eighty years on. It was a tribute to Edward, but she also wanted to see the similarities and differences brought about in eighty years. It would not be an easy journey, because Mary suffered badly from arthritis. At Myfanwy's suggestion Mary sought sponsors for the ride in support of the Arthritis Research Council. A report of the ride was published in the newsletter. Mary died in 1998 and her family, children and grandchildren, have now privately published a book celebrating Mary and the journey of twenty years ago in 2013, the centenary of the original ride. It is illustrated with maps and photographs and includes several other bicycle rides enjoyed by her. A few copies of this privately published book are available at £12.50, and anyone interested in buying one should contact Mary's daughter, Dilys Millard at 28 Jarmyns, Bishop's Hull, Taunton, TA1 5HG or by email at dilsinthegarden@aol.com

Alison Harvey finished cataloguing the Edward Thomas archive at Cardiff a while back, and they have just released the University Library online archives catalogue. The full Thomas archive is listed with all their other catalogued archive collections. Please see - <http://archivesearch.cf.ac.uk> it is rather good.

The Shipwrights Way which was first opened in 2011 has now been extended to cover the area around Petersfield and Edward Thomas country. Details can be found by visiting <http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/shipwrights/shipwrights.pdf> In the near future, there will be an extra dimension to the walk with the commissioning of twenty sculptures to 'tell the story of the landscape' along the trail. They will be carved from Portland stone and stand approximately waist high.

The manuscript of Edward's poem 'Cock-Crow', which was recently auctioned at

Bonhams for £20,000, was bought by the National Library of Wales, and was catalogued as NLW MS 23981E, f. 80.

In the July edition of *The Countryman* magazine there is an article on Edward Thomas by ETF member John Bainbridge.

Rambling: The Beginner's Bible by John Bainbridge is available at Amazon.co.uk.

'**The Edward Thomas Quartet**' by Philip Henderson is four settings of words by Edward Thomas and Helen Thomas. The pieces are: 'Adlestrop', 'So we lay, all night' (prose extract from *World Without End*), 'The Cherry Trees', 'Lights Out - Here love ends'. The pieces are for mixed voice choir and piano, and the music is published by Goodmusic Publishing, PO Box 100, Tewkesbury, GL20 7YQ, telephone: 01684 773883, www.goodmusicpublishing.co.uk. Philip Henderson is a British composer who has composed scores for the theatre and had a concert of his classical music performed at Cadogan Hall, London in 2010.

Ian Brinton has an article on the poem 'As the team's head-brass' in the current issue of *The Use of English*, vol. 64, no. 3.

The English Association is organising a major conference next year on WW1 and with that in mind there will be a new Bookmark series on poets/prose writers of the period. As the first in the series Ian Brinton has written a new one on Thomas and this is now on-line on the Association's website.

Cycling After Thomas And The English by David Caddy, published by Spout Hill Press, is now available from Amazon and elsewhere. The book commemorates and explores Edward Thomas's *In Pursuit Of Spring* and the English mind.

The replacement **Edward Thomas window** for All Saints Church, Steep, has been engraved by Tony Gilliam. There is a work-in-progress photograph on the back cover of the newsletter.



The Extra Walk



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