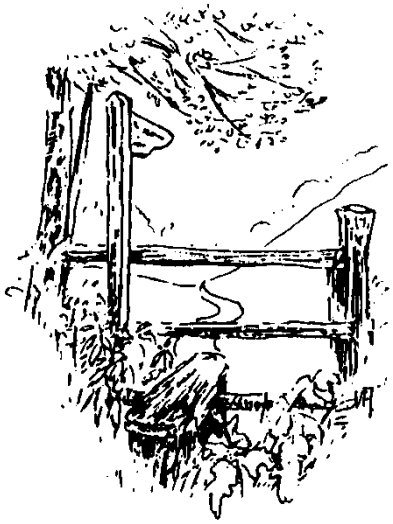
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



Perhaps I may love other hills yet more
Than this: the future and the maps
Hide something I was waiting for.

From 'When First'

NEWSLETTER 78 August 2017

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NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As all members know, 2017 is the centenary of the death of Edward Thomas at The Battle of Arras, and over forty members were able to visit Agny, where he is buried as well as the site of the observation post where he was killed. It was a moving and extraordinary experience, especially as we were to be at the OP at 7:36 a.m., the precise time that he was killed a century earlier. There are personal descriptions of the visit in this Newsletter, but I would like to add that we were not alone at Agny: when we arrived we met an English couple, who had travelled to be there all day and to witness the numbers, if any, who had also decided to commemorate the centenary. They hoped they would not prove to be the only ones there. A little later another couple, mother and daughter, arrived. They had driven from Contalmaison on the Somme, where, although British, they were creating a First World War museum. Again, it was the centenary that had brought them from a different battlefield. I have no doubt that others arrived during the day. Thanks are due to Andy Thompson of Battlefield Tours and David Kerslake of the Fellowship for their careful and detailed planning, which made the visit such a success.

The other major and entirely appropriate event during the centenary was the Study Day, which included the opening of the Edward Thomas Centre with the Tim Wilton-Steer Collection as its nucleus. Approximately 170 people met in St. Peter's Church, Petersfield. Again, there is a more detailed account in the Newsletter, but it was a great pleasure to welcome so many of Tim Wilton-Steer's relatives and friends, and to hear Tim's son, Christopher, speak so eloquently about his father. The distinguished lecturers included Edna and Michael Longley, Matthew Hollis and Guy Cuthbertson, while readings were by the equally distinguished Edward Petherbridge, Tom Durham and Michelle Magorian. On a beautiful and sunny day, this was a fitting celebration and commemoration. As always on such occasions, many people contributed to its success both on the day and in its preparation, which was complicated and time-consuming. Thanks to them all.

Richard Emeny

* * *

2017 Edward Cawston Thomas Poetry Competition.

The Competition drew a tremendous response with over seventy poems entered, most of high quality. No style, length or theme was stipulated, but the natural world, including human life as one element in it, together with memory and the past, seemed to inspire many of our poets. Not surprisingly many entries showed that they had learned from Thomas. The qualities identified by Edna Longley and Andrew Motion, among others, were apparent – that sense of thinking aloud, the quiet spoken voice, attention to small details, and an absolutely modern sensibility.

We are grateful to all the poets for giving their permission to publish, and an anthology of the winning and other well-deserving poems will be produced later this year. The poet Jenny Lewis, who judged the competition, wrote the following:

"Judging the Edward Thomas Competition has been a challenging task owing to the exceptionally high quality of the entries. So many of the poems impressed with their resourcefulness and variety of approaches that I had to read and re-read them many times before a clear winner emerged; and this was '*Eidolon*'. Beginning with an observation on the way language roots us to places, as well as to the mental and emotional landscapes that ghost just below the surface of our lives, this poem unfolds at a sure pace without putting a (poetic) foot wrong, leaving the reader with a memorable sense of unity and completion. The poem's sense of restraint adds to the weight of its subtext, and its muscular diction is supported by acutely sensitive lineation and placement of words on the page as in –

'And in the half-light

a mink
slinks soundless under the belly of the cloud
at the interface of earth and sky...'

Two fine but very different poems tied for second place – '*Whatever is forever*' and '*Deer Walking*'. '*Whatever is forever*' is an accomplished sonnet closely reflecting the powerful legacy Edward Thomas has left us as a war poet. With its epigraph drawn from Thomas' poem, 'Fifty Faggots', it shows us how the 'bundles of thin branch and twig' that the birds use to nest in are more permanent than the poet '...as he wipes his brow and walks out/ of the poem into his own thinning future...': yet both the inevitability of the seasons and Thomas' poetry bring comfort and a sense of gratitude. This poem particularly impressed me for its clarity and skilled craftsmanship. '*Deer Walking*' is a looser, more capacious poem alive with rich imagery and a wonderfully fresh and compelling use of language. From the very beginning, the poem enchants with its unexpectedness - 'Once, with a mother's vision, I could hear / the squeak of cell division.../ the humming of a tiny ribcage...' and 'Weightless, she sidesteps hawthorn hurdles / guides me over fissures deep as oceans...'. Congratulations to the winning and highly commended poets and thanks to everyone who submitted their poems. Judging this competition has been a great pleasure and privilege." Jenny Lewis, Oxford, February 2017

EIDOLON

by Romola Parish

He came from Scotland
where it's called driech,
she from the land of tarth and the Brenin Llwyd,
but in this in-between place
I don't have a word or a myth
for a day when the fine mist is not fog, or murk
or haze but, too heavy for the air,
it banks up
behind the belt of trees, filters
through the fire-break to mingle
with the river's breath,
and the sheep-bitten turf
pulls the damp over itself
and my skin
is cauled with moisture.

And in the half-light
a mink
slinks soundless under the belly of the cloud
at the interface of earth and sky,
pauses
not quite close enough to touch,
turns its sharp face to mine,

stares
with my father's penetrating gaze,
its pelt the colour of my mother's hair
beaded with prisms casting
pearls into grey

then fades

leaving musk wraithed in the chill
and the formless whiteness
and the bones of the trees
leaning into the absence.

WHATEVER IS FOR EVER

By Diane Tang

'A blackbird or a robin will nest there,
Accustomed to them, thinking they will remain...'
Edward Thomas, 'Fifty Faggots'

Yes, they will outlast the war, these fifty
bound bundles of thin branch and twig the poet
himself has lugged this hot spring day from copse
To field to stand close-packed against a hedge -
so dense as to seem a thicket. Enough
for several winter's fires, he thinks, though none
to warm him. And that too we know: he'll go
to war; he'll die; we understand. Yet still
we watch as he wipes his brow and walks out
of the poem into his own thinning future,
leaving us to creep with fancy, mouse and wren
through the strange new thicket and, like the birds
that will nest here come next spring, be content
that such a gift as this must be for ever.

DEER WALKING

by Stephanie van Driel

Once, with a mother's vision, I could hear
the squeak of cell division through the night air;
the humming of a tiny ribcage

wrapped in milky darkness; and
later, the crash and plunder of a teenage sulk landing,
a meteor in the porch. With no advance warning

silence thundered through these rooms. Fragments
of their smiles chased each other
like shrapnel,

lodging in all the crooked spaces.

Time heaped up against the doors,
blocked the chimney till it smoked, obscured the glass
thicket of blown fuses, kicked over the traces of corroding studs,
self-seeded
in forests of abandoned football boots.

Tonight, for the first time, outside
the rise and fall of my own breath,
I hear a nightingale on the Common.

Slippered, in my nightdress
I steal out and see a shadow
in the hazel scrub, standing motionless.

I know you. I remember.

Once, I saw you gaze helpless through deadwood
as your fawn, pursued by dogs tore
screaming through a chaos of bluebells; and

later, felt you watch me gather up those little cloven hooves like sticks
in Marks and Spencer fleece and carry him away.

Braver now, I cross the ripe belly of moss on tiptoe.
The doe follows; she presses her soft ear to my thigh,
and I can feel the earthlight flow through soles as thin
as deerskin.

Weightless, she sidesteps hawthorn hurdles,
guides me over fissures deep as oceans, past the boulders crouching
in the moonlight's shimmer.

I know you.

I rub her tufts of hair
in place of velvet nubs between my fingers, and stroke
the white curl beneath her chin. She unfurls her tongue
to lick the corners of her eyes,
and sighs.

Like me, she knows how the lightness of nothing
draws down the curtain of the night.

Margaret Thompson

The Birthday Walk, March 2017

It was a particularly poignant annual trek this year to remember beloved Steep poet Edward Thomas. Around 50 people gathered in the village for the Edward Thomas Fellowship Birthday Walk in the centenary year of his death at the Battle of Arras, on Easter Monday, 1917. The theme for the day was 'Edward Thomas in France: in the trenches and on the front line', with appropriate poems and prose read out at strategic points.

The strenuous five-mile hike took in a visit to Bee House, Edward's hill-top study, and the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. The readings this year were from Robert Macfarlane's book '*The Old Ways*', tracing Edward's journey from southern England, across northern France to the Western Front.

There was an afternoon walk too, with the highlight a visit to 2 Yew Cottages, Thomas' third and final home in Steep. There followed afternoon tea and a birthday tribute at All Saints Church for all walkers. The winner of the Edward Cawston Thomas Poetry Competition was announced, and the author read her prize-winning verse. A dramatic reading of Carol Ann Duffy's *The Christmas Truce* rounded off a memorable day.

Mike Cope

In the footsteps of Edward Thomas: selected highlights from the ETF trip to Arras, 8-9th April 2017

Andy Thornton, from Eye Witness Tours, is inspecting his clipboard and ticking off names as people arrive. He is wearing a brown fedora, festooned with badges from previous battlefield tours - one of which identifies him as a member of the Guild of Battlefield Guides. It's 9 am on a warm April morning, and I'm standing outside the Hilton Hotel, Victoria, with 40 other members of the Edward Thomas Fellowship (ETF), about to board a coach for Arras in Northern France. One of my fellow passengers is Lucy Milner – Edward's great granddaughter – who is travelling with her daughter (Sophie) and her mother (Jennifer). She has prepared a wreath to place on Edward's grave, comprised of Old Man, Lavender, Rosemary, Violets, Primulas, Forget-Me-Nots, Daffodils, Hawthorn, Pussy Willow and Wild Thyme; interwoven with the flowers are shells, chalk and fragments of pottery salvaged from the foothills of Steep, during last month's Birthday Walk.

We reach Dover in just under two hours, and then board a ferry for Calais. I fall in with Stephen Stuart – Smith, and Vanessa Davis who has brought wine and a picnic lunch for the crossing, which she insists we all partake in. Not wanting to appear rude, I drink my share of the wine, as the ferry lurches and rolls! A century ago, Edward Thomas sailed from Southampton to Le Havre at 7pm on a cold January evening.

The turbulent crossing on the *Mona's Queen* - a requisitioned paddle steamer previously used for Isle of Man pleasure trips - took 9 hours. The shortest, and most direct route, via Calais, was reserved for hospital ships ferrying the injured and the dying from the battlefields of Northern France. The Allies and Germany had been locked in a war of attrition in the trenches since late1914 and the war was fast becoming a stalemate. After disembarking the troop ship, Thomas and his comrades in arms spent a week in Le Havre, before boarding a slow train, which inched its way across the snow-covered hinterland of Picardy. His journey from Southampton to the Western Front would have taken around two weeks.
On the coach from Calais to Arras, 'The Man with the Hat' regales us with a potted history of WWI and explains about siege batteries, 5.9 howitzers, machine guns and enfilade fire. We arrive at Le Trois Luppars hotel, in Grand Place, Arras around 6 pm and dine soon after at Le Bateau Place des Heros. After the meal there is a spectacular sound and light display in the square, sponsored by the Canadian government to mark the 100th anniversary of their country's assault on Vimy Ridge.

Next morning we're up at 6 am sharp because we have to reach the Observation Post (OP) at Beaurains - where Thomas fell, in the opening minutes of the Battle of Arras - before 7:36 am. The organisers, Andy Thornton and David Kerslake (from the ETF), make sure we get there on time. The precise location of the OP has been determined with reference to trench maps, military records and a certain amount of educated guesswork. When we arrive, the sun is rising from behind the trees on Telegraph Hill and the patch of waste ground (where the OP once stood) is bathed in a warm orange light. In recent years an industrial estate has sprung up around the site, but the ground beneath our feet is still bare earth, as if it fiercely resists being anything other than a battlefield.

7.36 a.m. at the Observation Post outside Arras 100 years on. Photo: David Kerslake

Sometime between 9th February and 20th March 1917, the Germans made a strategic withdrawal from here, to the more easily defended Hindenburg Line (Siegfriedstellung). In doing so, they abandoned sections of the old front line, destroying anything that could be of advantage to the British, who moved forward to take over the abandoned ground. Thomas's war diary entry of 31st March 1917, described how he moved to a new OP, where there was 'a chalk-stone cellar with a dripping Bosh dug-out far under and by the last layer of stones is the lilac bush, rather short'. It's possible that he is describing a dugout in the former German position called Lowen Schanze (Lion's Entrenchment), which was adjacent to the OP where he was subsequently killed.

As the clock ticks round to 7:36 am on 9th April (the exact hour and minute when Edward's pocket watch stopped) - we pause for two minutes silence. Afterwards there are a number of readings: Lucy Milner recites 'In Memoriam: Edward Thomas' by Julian Thomas; Vanessa Davis reads 'Edward's last letter to Helen' and Stephen Stuart-Smith 'Lights Out'. We pose for group photographs, near the Beaurains signpost, before drifting back to the coach in the warm light of early dawn.

After a late breakfast at Le Trois Luppars, the Wellington Quarries is the next stop. The Quarries were originally cellars under Arras, dating from the Middle Ages, which were extended and connected with a network of tunnels, during WWI, by New Zealand miners. They provided a living space for troops and a means of tunnelling under No Man's Land, for launching a surprise attack on the German Front Line. The coach drives on to Agny Military Cemetery, where Edward Thomas was laid to rest in April 1917. Edward's great granddaughter, Lucy Milner, places the wreath she has made - with tokens of Steep flowers, shells and fragments of pottery- on his grave. Her mother reads a John Donne poem; Richard Emeny, the ETF chairman, provides an introduction and a number of other poems are read: Barbara Kinnes recites 'To Edward Thomas' by John Greening and Roland Maxted, 'The Owl'.
The sky is blue and bright and the temperature's rising; it feels more like June than April. There couldn't have been a better day ('and never will be while May is May'- but in fact it's only April)! Life carries on as normal in the provincial backwater behind the cemetery. As I walk past rows of white, dazzling headstones, I think of the tragic loss of life, and the families who mourned their passing. I'm starting to sense the scale of the suffering – and it seems incomprehensible. Some of the epitaphs are hopeful; others touching, biblical or bittersweet: 'Within our hearts he liveth still'; 'Not dead, but sleepeth'; 'Too dearly loved to be forgotten'.

Visiting the grave of Edward Thomas on 9th April 2017. Photo: David Kerslake

We leave Agny and drive to the Citadel in Arras, an old military fortress used as barracks by the Germans in WW2. We visit the Mur des Fusillés - a stark monument to the 218 patriots, from various towns and resistance groups, who were shot in the ditches of the citadel by the German occupiers. Someone suggests a minute's silence, to take in the gravity of the place.

The coach drives on to Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery with its 'Memorial to the Missing', where we briefly disembark. When we get to Bailleul Road East Cemetery, St Laurent-Blangy, Stephen Stuart-Smith reads 'Break of Day in the Trenches' at Rosenberg's grave. There is a short walk to a German Military Cemetery, which is set in woodland, with graves marked by grey crosses - not brilliant white slabs of Portland stone. Here Jeremy Mitchell reads 'Strange Meeting' by Wilfred Owen.

Next day the coach takes us to Hill 145 (Vimy Ridge) – the heavily fortified seven kilometre ridge, which held a commanding view over the Allied front lines in1917. As we journey, 'The Man with the Hat' regales us with another military anecdote: the day before the battle of Vimy Ridge on April 9th 1917, the British and Canadian troops exchanged places in the trenches in a highly covert operation. The next morning a huge banner (written in English) appears in front of the German lines, which simply says: 'Welcome to our comrades from Ottawa!'

When we reach the twin towers of the memorial, there are young Canadians everywhere in red jackets, who were present at the yesterday's centenary service, attended by world leaders, including Princes Charles, William and Harry. All around the site there are pairs of black army boots, representing the 10,000 Canadians who died during the offensive. We go on to visit mock-ups of the Grand Tunnel and trenches used by the advancing Allies. The huge craters made by the mortars are still visible. The statue of mother Canada ('Canada Bereft'), against a darkened sky, looking downcast and mourning for her lost sons, is particularly moving.

Our last stop is Notre Dame de Lorrette Souchez, to visit the Ring of Remembrance, where a wreath from the Edward Thomas Fellowship is laid by Ian Morton and a reading given. This vast golden ellipse, engraved with nearly 600,000 soldiers' names, was inaugurated as part of the commemorations for the World War I centenary. Nearby there is a chapel and the largest French military cemetery in the world.

The Fellowship placed a wreath near Edward Thomas's name on the Memorial at Notre Dame de Lorette. Photo: Lucy Milner

After an *al fresco* lunch on the lawn, we board the coach for Calais to make the return journey to Dover. About midway across the Channel, I look back, through the ship's wake, to the French coastline- which is now a distant speck; then turn and face the white cliffs, which are getting closer by the minute. It's been a trip worth making, which has affected me in ways I can't easily articulate.

Three weeks afterwards, a centenary concert for Edward Thomas - 'Roads Shining Like River Up Hill After Rain' (5 ghost shards for choir and cello) - is performed at the Stratford Literary Festival. The words are compiled by Robert Macfarlane from fragments of Edward's poetry, and set to music by Colin Riley. I will end by quoting the fifth (and final) 'movement' of the piece, 'The end fell like a bell':

The end fell like a bell
Soar in lone flight
So far,
Like a black star
A mote
Of singing dust
Afloat
Above
That dreams
The light of the new moon and every star
And no more singing for the bird
I never understood quite what was meant by God
Where any turn may lead to Heaven
Or any corner may hide Hell
Roads shining like river up hill after rain
Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone

Mike Cope

Reflections on the centenary visit to Arras and Agny, April 2017

We had last visited the area with the Fellowship in Autumn 2007. The previous trip had given us a general insight into the major battlefields of Belgium and Northern France whereas this visit focussed on Arras and Agny.

One of the most memorable moments was the on site visit to 244 Siege Battery O.P. at Agny. We were there one hundred years after Edward's death on the 9th April 1917 at 7:36. It was difficult to imagine what the area was like during war as we stood by the roadside surrounded by car show rooms. It was a time to reflect on the legacy of his poetry.

The other memorable moment was the visit to Agny Military Cemetery. It was bathed in warm, Spring sunshine whereas the Autumn leaves had been falling on our previous visit. Tributes were paid and Lucy (Milner) laid a most appropriate wreath composed of bits of moss, chalk, flint, feathers and spring flowers from Steep.

Finally we will remember the visit for the pleasure of travelling with other members of the Fellowship and meeting new faces from other organisations. All of us appeared to share a love of Edward Thomas and his writing, books, the countryside or walking. The anthology produced to accompany the tour is a souvenir to treasure, re-read and remember those days spent in Agny and Arras in April 2017.

Pam and Stephen Turner

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The following is a selection of excerpts from taken from conversations between Ian Mellor, friend of Andy Thompson of EyeWitness Tours and members of the Agny tour. They were each based on three questions: what is and has been your role in life? why are you attracted to the life and work of Edward Thomas? And, if you were allowed only one poem, which would it be?

Jack Lindsay gardener, Belfast

At secondary school we were doing a project on the war poets, Sassoon and Owen. Our teacher lent us her single copy of *A Choice of Poets*[i] and the poem in there that really caught my eye was *Swedes*, by Edward Thomas. I liked it because it reminded me of a visit to my grandfather in Donegal when he was ill and I was just a wee boy. It was in the middle of nowhere and I went out with my uncle and father to get potatoes. They were in a field in the middle of winter and under the straw protecting them you could see their bright colours. *Swedes* reminded me of that.

Favourite Poem (FP): *Swedes.*

A dream of Winter, sweet as Spring.

John Lingard, professor, English and Drama, Canada.

I grew up in England but left for Canada in 1969. I had a wonderful schoolmaster at Merchant Taylors' School, John Steen. He created a terrific enthusiasm for poetry, music and theatre. I became fascinated with Housman, de la Mare and Hardy and then went to a wonderful public lecture by Patrick Dickinson, also a poet. He read and explained many of Thomas' poems. I'd only read one at that point, *Adlestrop, but* thanks to Dickinson my interest grew over time and a few years ago online I found the Edward Fellowship and joined. I'm the only Canadian member.

FP: *Adlestrop*

And for that minute a blackbird sang,
Close by.....

Barbara Kinnes, teacher. Treasurer: Edward Thomas Fellowship.

I first became interested and joined the Fellowship back in the 1990s when I started teaching Thomas' poetry at A level at my school in Guildford. I'd always enjoyed his poetry since my own school days, I remember *The Owl* especially but in those days we never thought of Thomas as a war poet. He doesn't write about war like Owen and Sassoon, he writes about himself and the effect that war has on him. War is a personal thing for him. I became more involved and studied more of his background reading Helen's books and visiting Steep, which is very atmospheric. It's interesting how people's perceptions of the work of Edward Thomas have changed so much over the years.

FP: *The Owl*

……..the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

David Cobb teacher and educational writer

At 91 I'm the oldest member of the Fellowship and I'm here on a pilgrimage to visit Thomas' grave which I've not seen before. He has been a formative influence on me for many years and I'm now rediscovering things that I'd forgotten. A long time ago I was writing a book about English literature for use in Japanese high schools and included a poem by Edward Thomas. I hadn't any real idea who he was at that time. The poem was *Sowing.* I thought it would fit quite well with Japanese people who love plants. In fact most teachers didn't understand the material in the book and were losing face with their pupils! Things have improved a lot since then but for me now it's increasingly difficult to keep working. I'm still receiving royalties nevertheless!

FP: *This is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong*

I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.

Mike Reynolds farmer, Wales

I'm an Edward Thomas fan and I've been in the Fellowship since it started in 1980 I think. I've been a farmer and countryman all my life and came across his poetry as a teenager after I'd left school. There's so much in it about the countryside that I'd see everyday, like ploughing of course, but also little things he

noticed about country ways. I fell in love with his poetry. This is my second tour. We had a wonderful time on the first occasion, visiting the war graves and battle sites, including the grave of Wilfred Owen and the place where he was killed.

FPs: *A Private / As the Team's Head-Brass*

Above the town,
Beyond 'The Drover', a hundred spot the down
In Wiltshire.

Pauline Wills teacher of English

In 2000 I taught the poems of Edward Thomas to a Sixth Form group. Thanks to Andrew Motion, that year seemed to mark a change as the poems were becoming established on the syllabus. My students really enjoyed them and it all went well, so I joined the Fellowship and went on the walks. I chose my favourite poem because I love walking and where I live in Somerset there are walks over the Downs just as Thomas described. But there are so many poems I like, especially the short ones. *The Owl* and *As the Team's Head-Brass* are in my top three. It was a hard choice to pick just one!

FP: *Roads*

Now all roads lead to France
And heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead
Returning lightly dance.

Stephen Stuart-Smith publisher: Enitharmon Editions[ii]

Poets sometimes don't know when to stop!.....but Thomas can say so much in just a few lines. He had an astonishing outpouring of poetry in a very short amount of time from 1914, but never said anything unnecessary. His words are condensed into such beautiful form. He experimented too, and wasn't someone shackled to the past. *Head-Brass* is rather an enigmatic poem in that he is writing about the war but the effect it is having on those at home. I have published several books about and by Thomas, most recently Edna Longley's book *Under The Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric.* She

relates him back to Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth but also forward to those who follow the tradition. She compares him to Philip Larkin. Shortly we shall publish Richard Emeny's Book, *Edward Thomas: A Life in Pictures*. For me the whole thing has been a nice way of extending the personal into the professional as well. My choice of a single poem is because I think it's one of his best poems, about the power of memory, but also about a small child. I knew Myfanwy from the 1970s and couldn't believe that this very affable, charming and funny old lady was the little child in the poem.

FP*: Old Man*

Not a word she says;
And I can only wonder how much hereafter
She will remember

The entire collection can be found on the website and more will be published in the next issue of the Newsletter.

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Annual Study Day and Opening of the Edward Thomas Study Centre

"The day Edward Thomas came home"

Saturday 10 June 2017 may become known as the day the literary critic and poet Edward Thomas 'came home' to Steep and Petersfield. Just over 100 years since, in a letter to his friend Gordon Bottomley, he wrote on 2nd October 1916 "I have just seen Steep for the last time" as he took the train from Petersfield to their new home at High Beech, near Loughton in Essex (just over six months later he was killed in action on 9th April 1917 at the start of the Battle of Arras).

This ended a 10 year association with Petersfield, but the literary connection has never been lost and a wonderful Study Day, with a stellar line-up of speakers and readers, was crowned with a moving tribute to Tim Wilton-Steer and the official opening of the Edward Thomas Study Centre at Petersfield Museum. The Study Centre, a collaboration between Petersfield Museum and the Edward Thomas Fellowship, is based on an important collection of 1800 books by and about Edward Thomas put together by the late Tim Wilton-Steer during his lifetime and donated to the Fellowship by his widow Hilary following his death in 2011.

Prior to the tribute and opening, the 150+ attendees to the Study Day, which was held in St Peter's Church owing to demand for places, were treated to a full programme of readings and presentations by Edward Thomas scholars, actors, poets and authors who have been inspired by Thomas's work.

These included Michael Longley, one of our most prominent contemporary poets, his wife Edna, Professor Emerita of English at Queens University Belfast, Richard Emeny, Chairman of the

Fellowship, Guy Cuthbertson, Head of English at Liverpool Hope University, and Matthew Hollis who rounded off the 'Study' part of the day with an engaging and professionally delivered talk on Thomas's 'Path to Poetry, Path to War'.

Edward Petherbridge, Michelle Magorian and Tom Durham delivered distinguished readings from Edward Thomas, and Michael Longley movingly read some of his poetry. The event was concluded by an eloquent eulogy to Tim Wilton-Steer delivered by his son Christopher, followed by words from Tim's widow, Hilary, before the event moved to Petersfield Museum for the formal opening of the Study Centre. The day ended with a tour of the museum and tea and cakes in St Peter's Hall. During the afternoon, as some may be aware, one of our members attending the event was unwell. I am pleased to say he has made a full recovery.

For many attendees it was the first time they had visited Petersfield and for some an introduction to Thomas's work. Comments included:

"It was excellent for me - really a first proper introduction to the man and his work, and I appreciated it very much."
"I thought it was a triumph - all most interesting"
"(We) would like to send our thanks for everything – it was all thoroughly enjoyable and memorable!"

In summing up the day, Jeremy Mitchell, a trustee of Petersfield Museum and committee member of the Edward Thomas Fellowship said "it was a truly wonderful, and moving day enjoyed by all and I would also like to thank the South Downs National Park Authority, East Hampshire District Council and Petersfield Town Council for their financial support which helped make the day so successful.

Notes:

Petersfield Museum is open between March and the end of November on Tuesdays – Saturdays inclusive between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm. It is an independent, accredited Museum and receives no statutory funding. A small admission charge of £3 is payable (children free).

The Edward Thomas Study Centre is currently located in temporary space (pending completion of the Museum's re-development in 2021) outside public areas. From mid-July it will be open to visitors, by appointment, on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm. It is primarily a research and reference resource and will be open at other times to students and researchers, again by appointment.

Jeremy Mitchell

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Edward Thomas (1878-1917): The Centenary Conference, Université d'Artois.

Amidst commemorations, exhibitions, Sound and Light spectacles, parades and performances, the town of Arras, in Northern France, was host to 20.000 people who came to celebrate the centenary of the Battle of the same name, which started on April 9th 1917.

To mark the centenary of Edward Thomas's death on the first day of the Battle of Arras, a *colloque*: "Edward Thomas (1878-1917): The Centenary Conference" was organised at the Université d'Artois. Adrian Grafe (Université d' Artois) and Andrew McKeown (Université de Poitiers) were the two joint organisers of this conference, which took place on 6th and 7th April 2017, to pay tribute to Edward Thomas.

Three Edward Thomas Fellowship members made their way to Arras, to represent the Fellowship and to disseminate information about its forthcoming activities, in particular the inauguration of the Edward Thomas Study Centre on the 10th June 2017, in Petersfield.

A synopsis of the papers is given below, prior to the publication of the conference proceedings, in due course.

Andrew McKeown stressed that Edward Thomas is not an easy poet to categorise: his points of view are original and unexpected and his allegiances and affections complicated and never easy to deconstruct. His paper examined the ambiguities of the grounds Thomas occupies, through close readings of poems about time and space and those concerned with emotional relationships. It concluded with an assessment of Thomas's endings- how do the poems do or do not find closure. McKeown quoted Philip Larkin who observed that Thomas's life achieved a "serene and unquestionable climax" and ended on a question mark: can the same be said of his poems?

Adrian Grafe's paper was on *Feminine Influence on the Poets.* He remarked that not enough attention had been paid to this work by critics who are voluble on both Farjeon and Frost, but make no mention of *Feminine Influence on the Poets*. His starting point is the overlap between poetry and love and feminine influence in and on Thomas's writing. Grafe sketched out how poetry, love and food are intimately connected, indeed inseparable, in the writing of Edward Thomas and argued that 'Adlestrop' is a love poem in the strictest sense of the word. In conclusion, Grafe stated that Edward Thomas's *Feminine influence on the Poets* can be read in two distinct ways: either as a work of literary criticism and research or as a text providing a key to the poet Thomas was to become and, as Frost sensed, in a sense already was and always had been, providing clues to his own future poetic practice.

Four papers dealt with influences: Thomas and Frost, Thomas and T. Hardy, Thomas and Walter de la Mare, and Thomas and Ivor Gurney.

Ralph Pite's paper charted the stages of Edward Thomas's decision to enlist in the British army, suggesting the role that Frost played in that process. Frost had left the UK in February 1915, several months before Thomas resolved to take the step of joining up. Letters and poems exchanged between the two men in the first half of the year reveal Thomas's regard for Frost's opinion and his independence of mind. Pite (Bristol University) argued that the way Thomas reached his decision challenges, therefore, the established biographical account of Thomas's motives and reasons and that it also reconfigures the balance of power within his relationship to Frost. Pite concluded that Thomas emerges as less of a disciple, not least in the dialogue which is conducted through poems: Thomas's 'The Signpost', and Frost's 'The Road Not Taken', among others.

Emilie Loriaux from the Université d' Artois, the only French academic presenting a paper, spoke about Edward Thomas and Thomas Hardy. Her paper set out to understand the poetry of Edward Thomas in the light of Thomas Hardy. She argued that their sharing of rural rootlessness, particularly in time of war, and the avowed admiration of Thomas for Hardy allows us to better apprehend Thomas's poetry.

William Wooten's (Bristol University) talk was entitled: 'A richer opportunity': Walter de la Mare's presentations of Edward Thomas. His paper investigated Walter de la Mare's interlocking portrayals of Edward Thomas's poetry and the friendship he shared with Thomas. The paper looked at how de la Mare's declaration in the 'Foreword' that 'all that Edward Thomas was as a friend lies only half-concealed in his poems' had to come to terms with de la Mare's self-reproach at how his own first response to Thomas's poetry had been a damagingly cool one. Wooten investigated the way in which the 'Foreword' sets about aiding a more understanding reception of Thomas's verse. His paper also reflected upon the implicit reproach to Thomas contained within 'To E.T.: 1917', with its depiction of Thomas as one lured by death. The speaker concluded by finding in *'Sotto Voce'* a tribute to Thomas.

Philip Lancaster (Exeter University) talked about 'The impossibility of serenity': Ivor Gurney and Edward Thomas. His paper briefly covered some of Gurney's relationship with Thomas's work, and the manner of the kinship he felt with Thomas. He went on to stress that Gurney made more musical settings of Thomas than any other composer has done to date, and that facets of Thomas's manner are evident in Gurney's poetry from 1918 onwards.

Ian Brinton (writer, translator and independent researcher) addressed the question of: Thomas and Nympholepsy. He argued that E. Thomas was primarily Orphic and searched for an Edenised past that did not exist, stressing also the paradox of movement versus stasis in the poet's life and work. The focus of the talk was upon the Orphic vision which haunted so much of Thomas's life and work. The paper looked closely at 'Sedgewarblers' and 'Home 2' as well as taking some account of the short story 'The Attempt' from *Light and Twilight.* Brinton explored the haunting sense of Thomas's concern for trying to recapture the transience of what he came to feel increasingly as an Edenised past and how his obsessive walking was bound up with his need to re-discover what is gone.

Mario Mugia from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, brought an international dimension to the conference by focusing on the delayed arrival of Edward Thomas in the Spanish-speaking world. In the introduction to his volume : *Edward Thomas, poesía complete,* the Spanish translator Gabriel Insausti states that the poetry of Edward Thomas is a belated miracle since the London -born poet started writing verse at the age of 36, just three years before his death. Mugia observed that the same belatedness can be invoked when one speaks of the translation of Thomas's verse in the Hispanophone world. Thomas's collected poems were first rendered into Spanish only as recently as 2012. Mugia pointed out that, curiously enough, not one but two volumes appeared, almost simultaneously, in Spain: the first one, Insausti's own annotated *Poesía completa* and, the second one, translated with the same title by the Ibezan Ben Clark. In his paper, Mugia gauged the extent to which these two editions have aided further the late reception of Thomas's verse in the Hispanosphere. Moreover, he offered a critical comparison between the works of the two Spanish translators, while attempting a version of 'Up in the Wind' in an alternative, more 'Hispano-American' register. Mugia also addressed the question of the preservation of the melancholy and the cadence of the poetry, with reference to the poem 'The Owl', without sacrificing the sense of the source text. In his discussion of form and content he referred to Yves Bonnefoy who thought one could not translate a poet, only poetry. In conclusion, Mugia boldly asserted that "the translator is the best reader of a poem".

Helen Goethals (Université de Toulouse 2) spoke of 'Lines in a literary Landscape: Derek Walcott's homage to Edward Thomas'. As a member of a critical geography research group at her University, she used Tim Creswell's model of "Place" to analyse E. Thomas's poems. Goethals went on to point out similarities in the two poets' lives: ill-matched marriages, young family, depression, both seen as exceptional figures, etc. . .Goethals analysed D. Walcott's poem 'Homage to Edward Thomas' written in 1969 when Walcott visited England for the first time, and she speculated whether the poem was set in Steep or in Selborne perhaps?

Formal, informal, by a country's cast
Topography delineates its verse,
Erects the classic bulk, for rigid contrast
Of sonnet, rectory or this manor house
Dourly timbered against the sinuous
Downs, defines the formal and informal prose
Of Edward Thomas's poems, which make this garden
Return its subtle scent of Edward Thomas
In everything here hedged or loosely grown.

Jean Moorcroft Wilson gave the key-note lecture. She posited that Edward Thomas did not think of himself as a 'war poet', but that was what he was, according to his close friend, Robert Frost. In her paper she argued that Frost was right and that Thomas was a war poet, though of a particular kind. For Thomas's treatment is allusive and indirect. His explorations of such topics as memory, identity, disintegration, directionless and loss, which anticipate many of the themes of Modernist poetry, lead his readers' thoughts towards the War which was fought as he wrote his verse between 1914 and 1917. For Moorcroft Wilson, the War is always there as a dark, metaphorical background to it and, like Charles Sorley, Thomas occupies a significant central position among the war poets, between the jingoism of Rupert Brooke and the anti-war sentiments of the later Sassoon, or Wilfred Owen.

Moorcroft Wilson examined the pressures which led Thomas, a married man of 36 with three children, to enlist, in particular his love of the English countryside and the compiling of the anthology, *This England.* She went on to show that Edward Thomas's growing patriotism was charted in poems like 'There was a Time' and that there is even a hint in 'Lights Out' that he welcomed the possibility of death at the Front. She pointed out that his first unmistakeable reference to the War comes fairly late in his verse, in the second version of 'A Private' and is followed up in 'Digging', the first poem written after his enlistment. 'February Afternoon' and 'As the Team's Head-Brass' show an equal preoccupation with war, though again the approach is indirect. The paper closed with a reference to a recently discovered poem by Frost alluding to the death of a man he believed to be a 'war poet' without knowing it.

Deryn Rees-Jones (Liverpool University) and Charlotte Hodes (London University) presented their artistic collaborative project: 'And You, Helen': a filmpoem, a symbiosis between the written word and the visual representation, reminiscent of Matisse's Cut- Outs. This much acclaimed filmpoem being a *tour de force*, translating a critical engagement into an animated visualisation of Helen, the woman, the wife and the mother. 'And You, Helen' forms part of an on-going research project, 'Reimaging the Muse' in which various media are used to think about female creativity and the relationship between women, the body, image and text. Initially commissioned as a poem to commemorate the 2014 centenary, and now a book, as well as a 17 minute animated poemfilm, 'And You, Helen' explores the life of Helen Thomas, and her relationship with Edward Thomas. The poem and poemfilm (which takes the name of Edward Thomas's own poem to his wife) draws on Helen Thomas's memoirs to think about the experience of

mourning and memorialization in the context of the war, but also uses the relationship between Helen and Thomas as a touchtone for wider issues about creativity and marriage.

All the papers generated stimulating and thought provoking discussions.

Delegates were given the opportunity to attend the official opening of an exhibition at the Artois University Library : Edward Thomas 1878-1917, and the Battle of Arras, with readings of two of Edward Thomas's poems in English, and also in French by students in the English Department at the Université d' Artois.

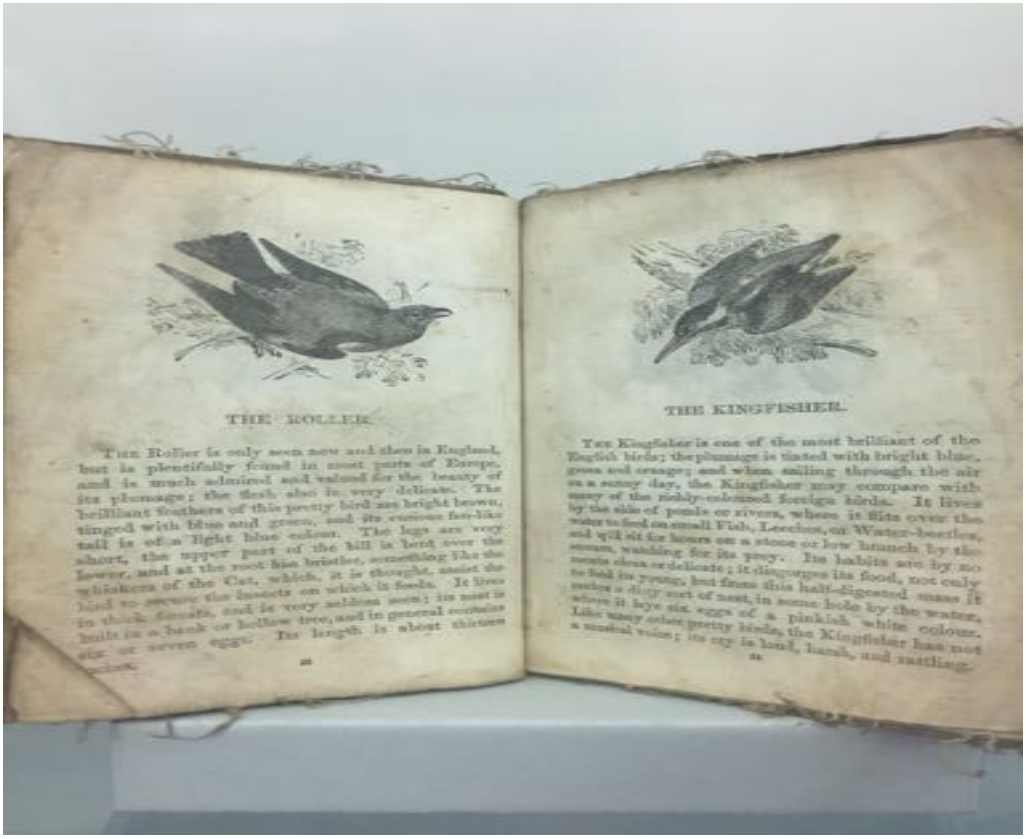
Marie-Marthe Gervais- le Garff

Celebrating Edward Thomas 100 Conference, Cardiff University 19th -21st April

This major conference was hosted by Cardiff University's School of English, Communication and Philosophy formed part of a series of events organized in Cardiff to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the death of Edward Thomas. Other events included a writing workshop, poetry performance, a daily dose of Edward's poetry by Tweet and a public exhibition featuring items from the Edward Thomas archive. The Edward Thomas collection in Special Collections in the Arts and Social Sciences Library at Cardiff University was started in 1940 when Gordon Bottomley, the poet and dramatist, presented the autograph manuscript of *Wales* and 238 letters and cards which Thomas had written to him between 1902 and April 1917, only a few days before he was killed at Arras. In 1948 Dr R. George Thomas, (later Professor) in the English Department at Cardiff University, agreed to edit the letters for publication after the fiftieth anniversary of Edward Thomas's death. *Celebrating Edward Thomas 100* was supported by the Learned Society of Wales and Literature Wales.

Among the many fascinating items on display was a cloth book of birds, a present from Edward to Merfyn on his first birthday, and a beautiful ladder-back chair made by Edward himself, previously known by the present author from Myfanwy's sitting room in Eastbury. The conference papers celebrated and contextualised his extraordinary literary output, tracing his poetic origins, influences and his quest for 'home' – 'understood as both a physical sense of belonging in the world and a metaphysical sense of wholeness and plenitude..." Katie Gramich, co-organiser. Among the speakers were Edna Longley, Lucy Newlyn, Andrew Webb, and Guy Cuthbertson, as well as younger scholars who are discovering Thomas afresh and bringing new perspectives to the study and interpretation of his work on themes ranging from Edward Thomas on parenthood to buildings as tropes of comfort and vulnerability in his poetry.

In discussion with their tutor, Carrie Smith, undergraduate students described their experience of engaging with items in the Special Collections, with one noting that physically reading original letters of condolence to Helen after Edward's death was an especially profound and moving experience.



Cloth book given to Merfyn by Edward on his 1st birthday: CU Special Collections

Edna Longley's recent book *Under The Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* published by Enitharmon Press was launched at the Conference. In this she relates Edward Thomas back to Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth but also forward to those who follow the tradition and reveals through lucid interpretations, the contribution his thorough knowledge and critical evaluation of poetry written in English made to his poetry. Conference attendees also enjoyed the generous and knowledgeable displays of books by and about Edward Thomas by Jeff Towns of Dylans Bookstore, Swansea and Noel Crack of F.N Crack Books, Blatchbridge. On the evening of the final day a whole room-full of diverse friends and strangers congregated at the Little Man Coffee Company to share poems, to listen to each other, and to acknowledge the 100 year legacy of Edward Thomas.

The morning of Friday 21st April had seen a group set out from the University on an excursion to Llyn-y-Fan-Fach, the background to which was described thus on the conference website ((https://edwardthomas100.wordpress.com/about). "In his 1905 work, *Beautiful Wales*, Edward Thomas recounts a journey he made on foot to Llyn-y-Fan-Fach, the high, remote lake in Carmarthenshire where a haunting Welsh fairy tale is set 'For Thomas, the path to the summit is 'a most potent, magic thing [...] even as I walked, the whole of time was but a quiet, sculptured corridor, without a voice, except when the

tall grasses bowed and powdered the nettles with seed at my feet. For the time I could not admit the existence of strident or unhappy or unfortunate things. I exulted in the knowledge of how cheaply purchased are these pleasures, exulted and was yet humiliated to think how rare and lonely they are, nevertheless. The wave on which one is lifted clear of the foam and sound of things will never build itself again. And yet, at the lane's end, as I looked back at the long clear bramble curves, I will confess that there was a joy (though it put forth its hands in an unseen grief) in knowing that down that very lane I could not go again, and was thankful that it did not come rashly and suddenly upon the white highroad, and that there is no such thing known as a beginning and an end.' [Edward Thomas, *Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp. 166-7]."

At the car park down a narrow land past Llanddeusant, we were joined by more members of Edward Thomas's extended family, Edward Thomas Fellowship members and friends for the walk to the lake ' under the chin of a high summit' where a number of readings took place, and further explorations of the landscape.

Julia Maxted

Llyn-y-Fan Fach: Photo by Julia Maxted

EDWARD THOMAS AT LLYN-Y-FAN

We are honouring Edward Thomas.
We follow his footsteps up the mountain
To the lake that snuggles under the might of it.
We feel the push and pull as up, up
We go and reach a shore and breathless

Perch on boulders from millennia ago.
A skylark rises, trilling the overture.
Readings from Edward Thomas begin:
The lady of the lake rises from the water.
We listen to some of the poems in Chinese
And through them hear Edward's cadences.
Poems, lake, mountain are translated.
The steep confines of the lake lock his words
That loop and lap within
And taken by the breeze ripple the water.

And the scoop of the mountain encloses them.

Mary MacGregor (18.05.2017)

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"Home to the Hangers" A short film about Edward Thomas

In the autumn of 2016, an organisation called Directors UK launched their annual initiative to help emerging film directors. It's called the Alexa Challenge as it's run in association with a camera and lighting manufacturer called ARRI. They make a camera called the Alexa, which is used for high-end TV and feature films, and if you win, you get the use of an Alexa Mini and a set of anamorphic lenses for a two-day shoot. This is a great prize as the camera hire costs and the value of these lenses puts it out of range for emerging filmmakers like me as it's too expensive to insure.

You had to pitch an idea in on their specified theme of 'Anniversary' chosen as it's ARRI's centenary. I went back to 1917 and besides World War 1, the other seismic events of that year weren't practical for a two-day shoot in any way e.g. the Russian Revolution and the French Army mutiny.

Millions of soldiers were killed in 1917, but one death stood out as notable in April – that of poet Edward Thomas. So I pitched an idea about Edward Thomas returning home to the place he loved most, the rolling landscape of Hampshire near Steep. The title was "Home to the Hangers" – focusing on the green and pleasant land that he felt was so worth fighting for, with images to be accompanied by an excerpt from "Lights Out". As a precaution, I got permission in principle from Hampshire County Council as it's a national park and was potentially subject to copious amounts of red tape.

Just before Christmas, I was told that I was one of the six winners, and the film had to go quickly into pre-production preparing for the shoot in March. Although there were some small bursaries attached the prize, everything had to be self-funded and this created many cost challenges – not least putting up a crew

for two nights. (The Cricketers at Steep was brilliant). The camera produces such pin-sharp images so any corner cutting on other aspects of production could have marred the film.

After many 'reccies' to work out what to shoot, where and in what order, the film was shot in March. I paid enormous detail to the original WW1 costumes but was limited by what the excellent Hampshire Wardrobe had available (size being a major factor as men were shorter and slighter 100 years ago). Also what he had in his pockets was part of the storytelling – the recent biography by Jean Moorcroft Wilson provided many useful insights.

The poster designed by John Mundy

After an intensive search, professional actor Alex Bartram was cast in role of Edward - mostly because he has a passing resemblance but he's also a very Edwardian face and a gentle speaking voice for poetry. We had to pray for fine weather. As many of you will know that when it rains, the clouds lower on to the Hangers and obscure the all-important view down the Meon Valley. We were lucky – overcast the first day, then a brilliant spring day on the second. All the kit had to be hefted up and down those muddy paths on the hangers. Only one person fell over in the mud, only one bit of kit took off down the hill on its own. But it was a fun if exhausting shoot. As Steep is under multiple flight paths, dogged by chain saws and the roar of the A3M, we filmed without sound and added all the sound effects afterwards including

the roar of the war and Thomas' favourite thrushes. Henry Bird, a young composer still studying at the Guildhall in London, then created an elegant sound track that was specially recorded.

Photo: Julian Bajzert

If you would like to watch the five-minute film, please follow this link https://vimeo.com/215390349. It will say it's a private video and ask for a password which is thomas (note the small initial t). As I am hoping this film will find selections in film festivals, I'd be grateful if you wouldn't publish this link and password anywhere online as this will nullify the entries.

For a selection of stills and other information about the many challenges of production for "Home to the Hangers", please visit www.hurcheonfilms.com

A D Cooper, film maker

IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

By Philip Edward Thomas

Published only in *The New Age*, 2 April 1896

"Coate is a name which has probably little significance for the mass of Englishmen: yet it may well be conjectured that this little hamlet will one day attain the celebrity, not to say sanctity, now enjoyed by the Hampshire village of Selbourne. For Coate is the birthplace of Richard Jefferies.

We set out on a pilgrimage, beginning with a journey by rail to Swindon Junction – where the traveller has no longer to wait for the "ten minutes" familiar but not dear in days of old. For the railway station we go up the steep hill leading to the "Old Town", passing on the way a stone-built house in Victoria-street, where Jefferies lived for some time after his marriage. We are here surrounded by many associations connected with the writer, who had to die in order to give life to his works. His friend Mr. William Morris, mentioned in Besant's Eulogy, a former editor of the Swindon Advertiser, had his offices in the same street; and close at hand is the office of the North Wilts herald, on which Jefferies served his apprenticeship as a reporter.

Leaving the town, we first take to the fields by a narrow stile near "The Lawn", the residence of "Squire Goddard". The footpath, often trod by Jefferies himself, winds pleasantly athwart broad undulating fields of pasture and mowing grass, through stiles and gateways, past dense hedges with their ash trees and pollard willows, and after a few minute's walk the place of our pilgrimage comes in sight. The path rejoins the main road, and almost immediately opposite is Coate Farm, where Jefferies first saw the light. By no means a striking farmstead, it is almost hidden by a high brick wall and a thick screen of pollarded limes, though actually facing though actually facing the highway leading from Swindon to Marlborough. The gateway, low and arched, is guarded by lilac and laburnum, and near at hand are the trees of the orchard. The old fashioned, appearance of the house is somewhat impaired by the slated roof, but the "skilling" and cluster of farm-buildings are thatched and moss grown, with ivy clinging to their weather-stained walls. Under the eaves, as of old, martins have placed their mud nests, and all through the village they are visible almost at every turn. Coate itself, lying at the foot of the Liddington Hills, is a straggling little place with quaint old cottages, a modernised inn, called the "Sun," and farmhouses standing some way back from the road.

By the roadside is the narrow brook let in which Jefferies was delighted to note an especial charm of glitter, and where great yellow marigolds grew in May amid the flags at the water-side.

At the back of the Farm, and hidden by close-growing ash and chestnut, lies the Reservoir, styled more poetically by Jefferies "the mere," embosomed among swelling meadows and shadowing trees. Here in the "old punt" the youthful Jefferies loved to wander, searching for "Calypso's cave ...and the Immortals ...hiding somewhere still in the woods." One recognises the place in the passage where he describes the voyage in the rickety boat with "Orion" the shepherd.

"Past the low but steep bluff of sand, rising sheer out of the water, drilled with sand martins' holes and topped by a sapling oak in the midst of a great furze bush. ... Past the barley that came down to the willows by the shore, ripe and white under the bright sunshine, but yonder beneath the shadow of the elms with a pale tint of amber. Past broad rising meadows, where under the oaks on the upper ground the cattle were idly lying out of the sultry heat. Then the barren islands strewn with stones and mussel-shells glistening in the sunshine. ... till presently she floated into the bay beneath the firs. There a dark shadow hung over the black water —still and silent; so still that even the aspens rested from their rustling."

These words are charmingly true to the life as we float upon the broad bosom of the lake with its osier islets and dense beds of lofty iris. Round about the waterside is many a nook where the youthful nature-lover often dreamed and pondered, shadowed by a leaf-woven canopy, and with the fragrance of woodbine drifting in through the hawthorns. Or again, along the rushy bank, where the greensward stretches to the water's edge, decked with cuckoo flowers and forget-me-nots, he was wont to loiter, watching the wavelets lapping the low marge or the pennon willow leaves flashing in the sun.

Away on the southern horizon the ridge of Liddington Hills is clearly outlined, marked by a clump of storm-driven beeches, known as a landmark for miles around. Every year the bird-nesters search the " Plain" (or plateau) for lapwings'eggs, and it was here and in the immediate neighbourhood, lying on the slopes of the ancient tumuli, that Jefferies meditated the thoughts expressed in *The Story of My Heart*. After the exhilarating ascent, he says:

"There was an intrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse, I walked round it slowly to recover breath. On the south-western side there was a spot where the outer bank had partially slipped, leaving a gap. There the view was over a broad plain beautiful with wheat, and inclosed by a perfect

amphitheatre of green hills. ... Woods hid the scattered hamlets, so that I was quite alone." Here, then, and close at hand, Jefferies lived some of the most exalted moments of his life.

In another direction lies Burderop Wood, where the keepers were doubtless intimate acquaintances of Jefferies and his unconscious models. A narrow footway leads to a hillside cluster of cottages, and on every hand Spring scatters her daintiest gifts. Pale wind anemones spangle the slopes and hedgemounds, and the violet hides amid the herbage growing about the stately ash and far
-spreading oaks. In June, about the open glades grown with sweet turf and bracken, we have seen the ghostly nightjar wheel, and the kestrel hover in his mid-day course.
On the opposite side of Burderop, and well known to all the country-side, is Ladder Hill, with its steep primrose-dappled inclines and grass carpets pranked with exquisite bird's-foot lotus, whose beauties Jefferies so eloquently celebrates. The huge time-stained boulders that are met with here and there form convenient resting-places after the climb, and all around at midsummer the brier hedges are
flushed with sweet wild roses.

Nestling on the sides of the downs are hill villages whither Jefferies wandered in his endless walks. Such are Chiseldon and Wroughton. About the thyme-scented hill-tops overlooking these hamlets are lanes and field-paths that lead the wanderer on many a delightful ramble. Here among the trees, stirring
from the breath of the roving wind, and beneath the hot sun-glow, we may fitly remember the words and spirit of *The Amateur Poacher*: "A something that the ancients called divine may be found and felt there."

"Edward Thomas was just eighteen and Dr W J Keith (Ed.- *Richard Jefferies: A Critical Introduction*, 1965) believes it to be Thomas's first essay on Jefferies to appear in print. Jefferies was born in Wiltshire in 1848, thirty years before Thomas was born in south London and when Jefferies died in 1887 Thomas was nine years old. They had never met, but the experience and discovery of Wiltshire and London's southern suburbs were common to both writers in their boyhood. Jefferies spent some school holidays at Sydenham and Thomas used to stay with his grandmother and aunt in Swindon... once 'the greater part of a summer term in a Board-school in Swindon'. He fished in the reservoir at Coate, explored the woods and fields and read 'above all, Jefferies'. Many years later he recalled [The Childhood of Edward Thomas] '...those last words of The Amateur Poacher: "Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, where twelve hours somehow have vecome shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients thought divine can be found and felt there still"...'
From Roland Gant's Introduction to *Richard Jefferies* by Edward Thomas (Faber, 1978)

EDWARD THOMAS AND SWINDON

From the age of nine Edward Thomas was a frequent visitor to his paternal grandmother's home in Swindon. On one occasion he walked all the way from London by way of Hungerford and Marlborough to get there. On another occasion, having arrived in Swindon on a family excursion from Brighton, he proclaimed that 'Swindon was a thousand times better'.[1] During these visits he made a number of friends and even attended a local school for a term. He wrote about his experiences in *The Childhood of Edward Thomas – A Fragment of Autobiography*. It would be no exaggeration to say that Edward Thomas came to love Swindon and its surrounding countryside and he maintained his links with the town for the rest of his life.

Swindon

The origins of Edward Thomas's connection with Swindon have been researched and described by a number of writers including Ken Watts in his book *Figures in a Wiltshire Scene*. Sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century Thomas's paternal grandparents, a Welsh engine fitter named Henry Thomas and his wife Rachel moved their family from South Wales to Swindon. They made their home in Cambria Place, opposite The Park. These purpose built cottages, complete with a chapel and public house, became home to many families from Wales who had come to work for the GWR Company. Watt's research shows that in 1881 Rachel Thomas, by that time a widow, was fifty-eight years old and living at 19 Cambria Place. The house is now 171 Farringdon Road and the Shanghai Chinese Restaurant.[2] This was the house that Thomas first visited as a young boy and may have had in mind when he wrote in an exercise book at the age of nine that the houses of Swindon were: 'like bull-dogs, small but strongly built'.

In *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* he described his feelings as he arrived by train for a visit:

'It was delicious to pass Wantage, Challow, Uffington, Shrivenham, to see the 75th, 76th mile markers by the railwayside, to slow down to the cry of 'Swindon' and see my grandmother, my uncle or my aunt, who worked in the refreshments bar at the station, waiting. It was for me a blessed place. The stone-work, the flowers in the gardens, the Wiltshire accent, the rain if it was raining, the sun if it was shining, the absence of school and schoolmaster and of most ordinary forms of compulsion – everything was paradisal'.[3]

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[1] Edward Thomas - *The Childhood of Edward Thomas – A Fragment of Biography* (1983), Redwood Burn Ltd, Trowbridge, p. 45.
[2] Ken Watts – *Figures in a Wiltshire Scene* (2002), The Hobnob Press, East Knoyle, Salisbury p. 205.
[3] *The Childhood*, p. 46

He goes on to describe his grandmother's house. The precise and detailed description of the interior is typical of Thomas and mirrors his meticulous descriptions of the natural world which he made in the notebooks he took with him on his endless walks into the countryside. Every detail was recorded, nothing was missed.

'No room was ever as cosy as my grandmother's kitchen. Its open range was always bright. There was a pair of bellows frequently in use. A brass turnspit hung from under the mantelpiece. The radiant steel trivet was excellent in itself but often bore a load of girdle cakes or buttered toast or more substantial things. An old brown earthenware teapot stood eternally upon the hob. Tea-caddies, brass candlesticks, clay pipes and vases full of spills, stood on the mantelpiece. On its walls hung coloured engravings of 'Spring' and 'Summer' and photographs of me and Mr. Gladstone's Cabinets and Mr. Gladstone and of an uncle who had died before I was born.[4]

The grandmother

Thomas described his grandmother at some length and although he thought her 'marvellously kind' she was also 'bigoted, crafty, narrow-minded and ungenerous'. He seems to have had little affection for her. He admitted with, characteristic honesty, that 'without her, these holidays would have been impossible, and she gave me countless pleasures' but concluded that 'if I loved her it was largely because of these things, not instinctively or because she loved me.'[5] Honesty about his feelings was one of Thomas's most attractive personal qualities and perhaps helps to explain how he was able to write such fine poetry.

The uncle

If he had mixed feelings about his grandmother, Thomas was less ambivalent about his uncle who he clearly admired as a lovable rogue:

'He seemed grown up, yet a boy by the way he laughed. He was a fitter in the Great Western Railway works and knew everyone. 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. He spent most of his evenings out at club or public-house, he neglected the garden and I dare say other things. I dimly knew that he was usually courting a farmer's daughter somewhere a few miles out, not always the same one. Sometimes when I was walking with him the girl appeared and joined us and at twilight I returned home'.[6]

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[4] *The Childhood* – p. 46
[5] The Childhood – p.47
[6] *The Childhood* – p. 49.

Relations between Thomas's grandmother and uncle were stormy and the uncle eventually left to start a new life in South Africa. Thomas described his departure:

'With a jaunty laugh deprecating my grandmother's tears and blessing's and my aunt's fierce distress, with a sixpenny bit for my brother and me, off he went, walking beside a man who wheeled his box to the station. It was said there were some girls who would have been sorry to see him go.'[7]

How Thomas himself felt we are not told. It is probably safe to assume that he was sorry to see him go too. The impressionable young boy had admired his uncle's skill at fishing, ability to conjure a whistle from the bark of a twig and his efficiency at killing water rats on the canal that ran behind Cambria Place and out into the countryside towards the village of Wroughton.

Girls and boys

Thomas spent the summer term of the year 1888 as a pupil at a Board-School in Swindon where the head master was a friend of his father's. As a result, although he tended towards shyness, he got to know many local boys and girls and 'became a Wiltshire boy in accent'. The increasingly tall, athletic boy from the big city engaged the curiosity of a number of girls. As Thomas tells us in *The Childhood*:

'At the Fete in August I spent all day and evening with a girl on each side of me – I do not think I had ever before or since so much pride and confidence'.

This would have been the Great Western Railway Fete held each year for the workers and their families in The Park opposite his grandmother's house. Occasionally one of his relatives from Wales would visit and he recalled one visitor in particular:

'Some of the most blissful hours I ever spent were in country walks with a buxom Welsh cousin named Florence, who was probably eight or nine years my senior. She and I used to walk along the quiet road, or over the meadows, to Shaw or Lydiard. I suppose I had a sort of happy unfettered adoration for her without knowing it. I never saw her after that summer'.

He also got to know 'a score of boys living near'. He boastfully told them that his family in London were well off enough to be able to order their coal by the ton. Suitability impressed, 'they in turn taught me their speech and games', including a local favourite which went by the name of 'Urkey' – a game that was best played in the evening. Thomas described the rules:

[7] *The Childhood* – p.95

'One boy who was Urkey stood still by a tin can while the others hid. When a shout told that they had found a hiding he went in search of them. His object was to see one and run home to the can, crying 'I Urkey Johnny Williams'. If the one thus singled out, or any other, could get to the can first and kick it away, the game began all over again. Otherwise the one successfully Urkied had to take his place at the can.'

He remembered having eggs boiled brown in coffee grounds at Easter and on 29 May, which was Oak Apple Day, wearing an oak spray. In August he went with the other boys to the Fete with 'a bag of cake and tickets for the rides'. Comparing his Swindon friends with his friends in London he concluded that 'for some good reason I preferred the sons of Swindon mechanics and labourers to Battersea tradesmen and clerks'. Even as a boy Thomas was intrigued by the speech and language of his new friends. He recalled that:

'The speech of the boys, the humming mellowness of it, the rolling r's, the strange idioms and words, remained a half-conscious delight. One day one boy said to another named Bacon who was losing his temper: 'Simmer down, rasher.' And I was continually recalling and tasting the phrase and the accent'.[8]

Thomas returned to these themes as an adult in discussion with his great friend Robert Frost as they rambled through the fields around the village of Dymock in Herefordshire during the summer of 1914. At that stage in his life the poet in Thomas was about to be born but the fascination with words and the ways in which they can be used that made his poetry possible began in his childhood. Later still he explored the poet's relationship with language in the poem 'Words' in the first verse of which he poses the question:

Out of us all
That make rhymes,
Will you choose
Sometimes –
As the winds use
A crack in a wall
Or a drain,
Their joy or their pain
To whistle through –
Choose me,

[8] *The Childhood* – p. 53

You English words?[9]

'Dad'

It was whilst fishing in the canal that ran behind his grandmother's house with a local boy called Fred that Thomas made his most significant and long-lasting Swindon friendship. Years later in *The Childhood* he recalled that first meeting:

'I remember him first as a stiff straight man, broad-shouldered and bushy bearded, holding his rod out and watching his float very intently. Suddenly up went the rod and a little roach flew high over his head into the hedge behind. 'Daddy bin got one!' shouted the boy with me. We laughed and the old man laughed too'.[10]

This was the start of a friendship that was to last for the rest of Thomas's life. The man was David Uzzell but from this first meeting onwards Thomas referred to him as 'Dad'. He lived in Swindon with his wife and had three grown up sons who Thomas also came to know well. Dad had been born in Kemble in 1841 and had enjoyed a varied career:

'Dad had done some poaching in his younger days. An Odd-job man, militiaman, and latterly outdoor assistant to grocers, he had not had time to become very respectable'.

However, by the time of the meeting on the canal Dad had mellowed somewhat, given up drinking and joined the Salvation Army. The two became firm, if unlikely friends and together they tramped the Wiltshire countryside around Swindon. In an unpublished essay written when he was just sixteen and, entitled simply 'Dad', Thomas painted a detailed portrait of his old new friend.

'No man at his age ever had a straighter back, that we were sure of, like the groundash stick he always carried. His clear, steel blue eyes looked you full in the face without a spark of insolence. Time had left few furrows in that full strong face, sunburnt like his sinewy neck. His nose and chin were perhaps his strongest features: almost Grecian in their fineness and regularity. A profusion of fair hair silver a little near the ears fell about his neck and was hardly kept back by a hard felt hat. He used to tell us with a sparkle of pride of enormous weights lifted by him in his youth and of fights where he had felled a man like a bullock. Recalling the mad days of youth in fact, a fierceness, almost brutal, showed itself and

[9] Longley (2008) – p. 91
[10] *The Childhood* – p. 130

destroyed the symmetry of his face. In such moments he was not himself, for age had quelled the turbulent spirit, and tamed what must have been a temper indeed.[11]

Thomas was later to immortalise his friend in one of his finest, longest and favourite poems 'Lob' which he finished on 3/4th April 1915 and which begins:

At hawthorn-time in Wiltshire travelling
In search of something chance would never bring,
An old man's face, by life and weather cut
And coloured, - rough, brown, sweet as any nut, -
A land face, sea-blue-eyed, - hung in my mind
When I had left him many miles behind.[12]

The young boy was fascinated by Dad's comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the natural world:

'We found he had a whole store of out of door knowledge he was quite ready to impart'.

And there were the animal impressions:

"I remember being highly amused at his rendering of a young rook's cry whilst gobbling a worm: it was truly perfectly rendered. He would startle people on a dark night by making the yell of a cat'.

He was also attracted by Dad's frankness and honesty, qualities which Thomas noticed and valued in himself:

'*Sex was alluring and amusing, whenever it was revealed, because the grown-up world for the benefit of the young was endeavouring to keep up the appearance of doing without sex. Thus Dad's extraordinary freedom was equally amusing and alluring. At first I supposed him to be a wicked old man until I came to believe that all men were radically like him but most of them inferior in honesty.*[13]

His grandmother, however, was of a different view as Thomas remembered in *The Childhood*:

'When she wanted to warn me against going fishing some miles off with a strange man she hinted that he might be Jack the Ripper'.[14]

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[11] Edward Thomas – *Dad* (c. 1894-5), Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter Number 46, January 2002.
[12] Longley, 2008 – p.76.
[13] *Dad* – p. 8.
[14] *The Childhood* – p. 133.

In adult life Thomas sent letters and gifts to Dad and his wife but the visits were of necessity less frequent. When he heard of Thomas's death Dad wrote a letter of condolence on 5th May 1917 to his widow Helen:

'It was a blow to me and my family we all liked him and we was cut up bad as if it had been one of our hown boys. I haven't got over it yet and Mrs. Uzzell says she is sorrey because he was so kind to me. Did he ever tell of one of our rambls When we went to a hous out in the country to have a cup of tea and the fowl came into the room and went in the cubord and laid an egg in the cuberd and Edwin had it for his tea laid wile you wait. I must conclude with Love and respect to you all from David Uzzell God Bless you all rite soon pleas'.[15]

Dad died just two years later and was buried in Radnor Street cemetery in an unmarked grave. Ken Watts recently undertook some research on behalf of Dad's great-grandchildren in an attempt to identify the precise location of the burial. According to Watts Dad had been living at 7 John Street when he died and his funeral took place on 13th December 1919. Having identified the location in 2004 Watts, along with Dad's great-grandchildren Shirley and Janet, left some flowers, and a card which included photos of Thomas and Dad and the first verse of the poem Lob quoted above. [16]

Richard Jefferies

One book, however, did bring him some pleasure. In May 1907 he was commissioned by Hutchinson to write an 80,000 word biography of the writer and journalist Richard Jefferies who had lived at Coate near Swindon. It gave Thomas the opportunity to visit Swindon once more, this time accompanied by Helen, and re-discover the countryside that he had come to know so well as a boy. In *As it Was* Helen described how much the book meant to him:

'It was a book entirely after his own heart, for Jefferies had been one of the earliest and strongest influences in his life, and the years which he had spent in the Jefferies country in Wiltshire were the most treasured memories of his boyhood'.

And how much it meant to her:

'The fortnight we spent in Wiltshire was one of the happiest times of my life, and one of the few holidays of any length which Edward and I had alone together. Many of the days stand out clear in my mind today – the ways we went, the things we saw, and even the words we spoke. We walked all day long, and

[15] Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter Number 31, August 1994.
[16] Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter Number 59, January 2008.

Liddington Castle – an old British camp above Swindon – Wayland Smith's Cave, and the White Horse of Uffington became as familiar to me as our bare hillside in Hampshire'.

They ranged far and wide as she recalled:

'Savernake Forest, Marlborough, Malmesbury, Shaftesbury, Amesbury, Devizes, Westbury and Bradford-on-Avon are some of the places I particularly remember, and of course the special places connected with Jefferies'.[17]

As part of the research for his book Thomas interviewed members of Jefferies' family and others that had known him. Although he had never met Jefferies and was only nine years old when he died, the Wiltshire writer's books and ideas had inspired the schoolboy. Thomas recalled how he had copied out a favourite paragraph from Jefferies' *The Amateur Poacher*, which reflected his own feelings about the countryside, into the back of as many of his school books as he could:

'Let us get out of these indoor narrow modern days, whose twelve hours somehow have become shortened, into the sunlight and the pure wind. A something that the ancients thought divine can be found and felt there still'.

In *The Childhood* he explained the attraction Jefferies' writing held for him:

'What I liked in the books was the free open-air life, the spice of illegality and daring, roguish characters – the opportunities far exceeding my own, the gun, the great pond, the country home and the apparently endless leisure.'

Jefferies' writing made a significant impact on Thomas' earliest work. In this case imitation really was the sincerest form of flattery. He recalled his first attempts at writing country sketches whilst still at school:

'I had begun to write accounts of my walks in an approach as near as possible to the style of Jefferies'.[18]

Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work was finally published in February 1909 and although Thomas was not entirely satisfied with the book it was well received by critics at the time and has been well regarded by many since. In 1938 one reviewer described it as 'a classic in critical biography' and praised the book for the 'sympathy that informs the narrative and the intelligence that directs the criticism',[19] comments that Thomas would no doubt have appreciated had he lived to read them.

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[17] Helen Thomas – p.122-24.
[18] *The Childhood* – p.134
[19] Edward Thomas – *Richard Jefferies* (1987) Faber and Faber, Manchester. Quoted in the Introduction by Roland Gant re. Mrs Q.D. Leavis in Scrutiny (4th March 1938).

Journey's end

Five years later, on 4th August 1914, Thomas was cycling through Swindon with his son Merfyn on their way to join the rest of the family and the Frosts near Dymock. As they passed through Swindon they heard the GWR hooter sound ten times to announce the start of the war. After agonising for months Thomas finally joined up in July 1915 and in December 1916 he volunteered for service overseas. He spent one final Christmas with the family, by then living at High Beech in Essex, before sailing for France. Twelve weeks later he was dead.
A lengthy obituary of Thomas appeared in the Swindon Advertiser on May 4th 1917. Its tone and content would no doubt have pleased him:

'His passionate love of the countryside was largely nourished in the neighbourhood of Swindon, along the Canal Side to Wootton Bassett, around Coate Reservoir, and elsewhere. No man has done more and, in more capable language painted the beauties of the environs of our town'.

Helen confirmed this in *As it Was* some nine years later when she wrote that:

'The downs country about Swindon he knew and loved as no other part of England.'[20]

There can be little doubt that the time he spent in and around Swindon had a major impact on Edward Thomas's life and his development as a writer, first of prose and later of poetry. On his childhood visits to Swindon he was often accompanied by his brother Julian, who also joined him on his bike ride across southern England in 1913 from London to the Quantocks searching for the early signs of spring. After his older brother's death, Julian wrote a poem called 'In Memoriam: Edward Thomas' . These are the final four lines:

Fair spring you loved the saddest memory brings
Of Eastertide, when you rode forth with me
In quest of something we were not to find.
Perhaps another world has proved more kind.

(In Anne Harvey – *Elected Friends - Poems For and About Edward Thomas* (1991), Enitharmon Press, London, p. 17.)

David Kerslake

[20] Helen Thomas – p.122.

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PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

A selection of the many events that have taken place so far in this Centenary year.

'Roads Shining Like River Up Hill After Rain' (5 ghost shards for choir and cello). Music by Colin Riley and text compiled by Robert Macfarlane

This Edward Thomas centenary concert for choir and cello took place on 29th April 2017, as part of the Stratford Literary Festival. This was the second performance of concert series, which was premiered at New College Chapel, Oxford, by an eight-piece choir (Oxford Bach Soloists), conducted by Tom Hammond-Davies.

The text was arranged and compiled by Robert Macfarlane from fragments of Thomas's poetry, and some lines from the war diary, to create 5 new 'song-cycles', which were meant to represent Thomas's metaphorical journey from Steep to the Western Front. The piece was arranged in five parts: (I) 'Open your eyes to the air', (II) Half a kiss, half a tear', (III) 'I have come to the borders of sleep', (IV) 'Figures suspended still and ghostly white', and (V) 'The end fell like a bell'. Each section ended with a different quatrain from the poem 'Roads'. The text was constructed by weaving together lines from various Thomas poems into a kind of verse tapestry: a simple idea which anyone might have thought of - but didn't. 'The end fell like a bell' is a line from a lesser-known rarely-quoted poem: 'Ambition'.

The concert programme explains that the solo cello was meant to be an embodiment of Thomas himself, travelling through a landscape with the rhythmical suggestions of walking. The body of the instrument was also played percussively at certain points during the recital. Because Thomas's own musical tastes were more attuned to folk song, it is difficult to know what he would have made of '5 ghost shards for choir and cello' – an experimental piece, in line with Colin Riley's other classical compositions. Those who prefer music to be avant-garde and discordant would have rejoiced at Riley's score. Those with more orthodox tastes - who prefer their music to 'carry a tune' - may have found it bewildering.

What cannot be denied was the ability of both the Oxford Bach Soloists and the cellist to carry off the performance with aplomb. Regardless of what musical camp the listener falls into, the idea of a concert to commemorate Edward Thomas was a wonderful gesture, and the composer and lyricist should be commended for their efforts.

Mike Cope

Petersfield Music Festival: The Edward Thomas Centenary Concert

Friday, March 17, 2017

The Petersfield Musical Festival opened with an Edward Thomas centenary concert, to mark the 100th anniversary of the poet's death at the Battle of Arras on Easter Monday 1917.

Edward Thomas once famously remarked in his 1909 book The South Country: "I prefer All round my hat and Sumer is icumen in to Beethoven". His youngest daughter, Myfanwy, recalls sitting on her father's knee wrapped in a blanket, whilst he sang her favourite song O father, father, come build me a boat, and the sea shanties he had learnt from one of the crew of Shackleton's Polar expedition. When compiling The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air, in 1907, he sought out the most authentic words and tunes from folk song collectors like Cecil Sharp, and supplied musical notation for lesser-known songs.

This presents a challenge for a musical festival, steeped in the classical and choral tradition, on how to commemorate a poet with a passion for folk music? Any concert in his honour would need to take account of his musical preferences and this is precisely what the organisers of the Petersfield Musical Festival have done. By taking the folk tunes Thomas sang to his children and choosing arrangements for choir, piano, harp and flute, they remained true to festival tradition, whilst acknowledging Thomas's folk roots.

Choral and solo settings of poems by Thomas's contemporaries (Walter de la Mare, Eleanor Farjeon, Robert Frost and W.H. Davies) comprised the first half of the concert. Three poems from The Nursery Rhymes of London Town, by Eleanor Farjeon – set to music by Mervyn Horder – were particularly pleasing. These were interspersed with choral arrangements of traditional folk songs Thomas would have known and loved, such as The Minstrel Boy and The True Lover's Farewell. The Musical Director and Festival Chair, Philip Young, introduced the pieces with an insightful script and masterly oration.

During the interval there was an opportunity to view photographs, inspired by the life and works of Edward Thomas, taken by members of the Petersfield Photographic Society. Books and documents relating to Edward Thomas, from the recently acquired collection at the Petersfield Museum, were also on display.

The second half of the concert was given over to musical arrangements of Thomas's own poetry by of Ivor Gurney, Michael Hurd, Tarik O'Regan, William Agnew and others. These were mainly choral arrangements by 20th century classical composers. One of the standout songs was Agnew's Thaw, sung by the Bedales Cecilia Consort, directed by Nicholas Gleed. The avant-garde musical arrangement –

with brooding cellos, and voices that seemed to hang endlessly in the air – appeared to suit the mood of the poem. Another highlight, The Great Silence, by Tarik O'Regan, saw the Vox Cantab choir, conducted by Jonathan Willcocks, deliver some haunting harmonies .

There were readings of Thomas's own poetry by Piers Burton-Page, a former BBC Radio 3, producer, presenter and editor. Someone commented that his rendition of As the Team's Head-Brass was "one of the finest they had ever heard".

The question we are left with is – what would Edward Thomas have made of it all? Unlike Frost, who rarely allowed any musical arrangements of his work, Thomas would probably not have minded either way. It seems from his writings that he never expected to be remembered at all. In one of his poems, he remarked: "What will they do when I am gone? It is plain that they can do without me, as the rain can do without the flowers and the grass". How the passage of a 100 years has proved him wrong! His poetry had barely got going when he was killed in action on the Western Front on Easter Monday 1917. This commemorative concert was a wonderful idea and a fitting memorial to the Steep poet who became one of the founding fathers of contemporary British poetry.

Mike Cope

Edward Thomas Flower Festival, All Saints Church, Steep
16-18th June 2017

In June 1978, an Edward Thomas Centenary Flower Festival was organised in All Saints' Church, Steep to commemorate the centenary of his birth, by a local resident, the late Joy Clarke. In June 2017, the Friends of Steep Church (FOSC) organised another Edward Thomas Festival of Flowers, this time to commemorate the centenary of his death in France at the battle of Arras.

The 2017 Flower Festival was not a competition, the idea was to enthuse children and adults about Edward Thomas's poetry and to generate an opportunity to become better acquainted with the life and works of this poet who had strong local connections. This was a community effort, with various local organisations and several schools undertaking a flower arrangement each to illustrate an Edward Thomas poem (or prose) of their choice.

Fourteen groups participated, with exhibits ranging from a handmade wooden train to portray 'Adlestrop' to a superb flower display in the font with a throne and high arbour to illustrate 'What shall I give'. This magnificent floral tribute was the work of Kathryn Irvin of the Edward Thomas Fellowship. Lucy Milner, Edward Thomas's great granddaughter, kindly signed two copies of 'The Green Roads' which were presented by ETF members to the two local primary schools who participated : Dunhurst pupils who illustrated 'Tall Nettles' and Steep Church of England VC Primary School pupils who chose 'Birds' Nests'. The English teacher at Steep Primary told me that the children took this copy to read from on their annual summer outing, a walk up to the Stone.

There were also poetry readings and marvellous musical interludes organised by students at Bedales School on two days: a cello recital the first day and a singer the second. The weather was glorious, refreshments and homemade cakes were available in the marquee. Numerous visitors came along – including some who had never heard of Edward Thomas – and generous donations were gratefully received by FOSC.

A member of the Edward Thomas Fellowship wrote subsequently:

"We certainly had a thoroughly enjoyable few days being involved and watching all the wonderful innovations taking place and being built up... If Edward Thomas had been passing by and chanced upon our activities, I think after being bemused and a little retiring and embarrassed he would have secretly been so pleased and we hope proud that after a hundred years people cared so much; we know how much pleasure it would have given to Helen his wife".

Marie-Marthe Gervais-le Garff

Kathryn Irwin in front of her beautiful flower arrangement in All Saints Church, Steep to illustrate the poem :'What shall I give ?'.

Edward Thomas and the Battle of Arras

The village of Adlestrop paid homage in Adlestrop church on Sunday, 9 April 2017. There were talks by Anne Harvey, author of *Adlestrop Remembered*, and at the circumstances of Edward Thomas' time in

the trenches, plus readings of poems that reflected his significance as a war poet, as well as poems that paid tribute to his work.

3rd Annual Poetry Festival: Unitarian Chapel, Padiham, June 2017

This year's festival celebrated the range and power of 20th century war poetry including Isaac Rosenberg, Edward Thomas and Wilfred Owen.

Fallen Poets: Edward Thomas & Hedd Wyn (18 February 2017 - 2 September 2017) National Library of Wales, Gregynog Annexe.

Hedd Wyn is known as the 'Poet of the Black Chair' after he posthumously won the chair at the Birkenhead National Eisteddfod for his ode 'Yr Arwr'. Edward Thomas is often referred to as one of the most important poets of the twentieth century, even though his whole poetic output was created in the two years prior to his death. Born over fifteen years and two hundred miles apart, they are connected by Wales, poetry, nature and the War.

South Downs Poetry Festival Steep Village, Sunday April 9 2017.

A day of commemoration for the centenary of the death of Edward Thomas was held that included include walks, workshops, music and readings, rounded off with an evening event of words and music in All Saints Church, Steep.

Northern/North-western Group of the E T F with the Friends of the Dymock Poets

Our third meeting took place on the 11th April at Holden Clough Nurseries, in a scenically delightful area not far from Clitheroe where we were warmly welcomed and quickly settled in a newly designated meeting/lecture room, nicely close to the food ordering area. Our main Subject was to be Edward Thomas. We reminded ourselves of his love of folk music and sea shanties, which he used to sing with his friend Arthur Ransome when they cycled to meet at The Red Lion at Lowick, and his often-overlooked sense of humour (remember his delightful 'skit' on 'The Lincolnshire Poacher'?).

We each read our chosen poem: - 'Tall Nettles', that celebration of neglected things and the farmers' habit of keeping old implements; 'At the Team's head Brass' – such a favourite, invoking the inevitable question as to which of them asked ' the 'indirect question; 'Aspens' so subtle and beautifully read; 'Melancholy', inviting discussion as to who are "my foes"; and 'The Huckster', that often overlooked piece of pure observation.

Valerie Haworth

Inspired by the Word (1 June - 1 September 2017)

An exhibition by contemporary artists celebrating the literature of Jane Austen, Edward Thomas and Gilbert White showcases sculpture, letter carving and works in other media. Taking place at a number of venues, the exhibitors in the Petersfield Physic Garden are Lisi Ashbridge, Mark Evans (also at Gilbert White's Garden), John Neilson and Jo Sweeting.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Autumn Walk

The Autumn Walk will take place on Sunday October 8th and will celebrate the 80th anniversary of the dedication of the Memorial Stone on the Shoulder of Mutton. A Member's Note will follow with details.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Emeny, R. (2017) *Edward Thomas: A Life in Pictures* (Enitharmon Press)

Longley, E. (2017) *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (Enitharmon Press)

Riding, J. (2017) *Land Writings: Excursions in the footprints of Edward Thomas* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing)

Stenning, A. (ed.) (2017) *Edward Thomas: A Miscellany* (Rucksack Editions: Galileo Press)

MEMBERS NOTICES

John Barnes very kindly not only put together the first Index of Newsletters (with Colin Thornton compiling the later part of the current full index), but also has donated his complete set of Newsletters to the Fellowship.

John has a number of books and pamphlets by and about Edward Thomas for sale. Enquiries please to him at: barney428@icloud.com