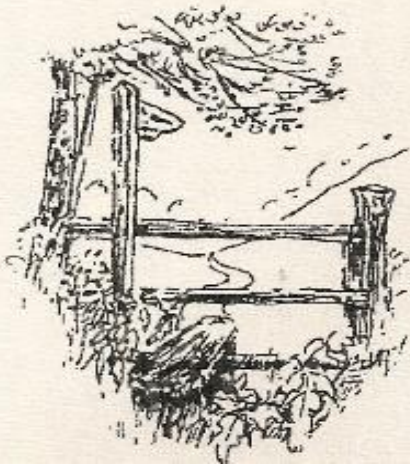


THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



NEWSLETTER 77

February 2017

Chairman Richard Emeny

Secretary Ian Morton

Quotes from Edward's War Diary

7th April Up at 6 to O.P. A cold bright day of continuous shelling N.Vitasse and Telegraph Hill.....Larks, partridges, hedgesparrows, magpies by OP

8th AprilA 5.9 fell 2 yards from me as I stood by f/c post. One burst down the back of the office and a piece of dust scratched my neck.....

Letter from the Chairman

As with much of the world at present the management of the Fellowship is in a state of flux. At this year's AGM there will be proposals to change the responsibilities of various members of the Committee. In particular the Editor of the Newsletter, Guy Cuthbertson who has done sterling work over the past years in maintaining and developing editorial and literary standards is resigning and it will be proposed that the Editorship will pass to Julia Maxted and Margaret Thompson. Julia, amongst other strengths, is a current academic and Margaret is an author. Julia is also a member of the wider Thomas family. Pressure of work has caused Guy to resign. As a consequence this Newsletter has largely been under my control. I hope you will bear with us kindly in this transitional period. I am however pleased to report that the two 'new' editors plan to continue with the newsletter in its current format and published twice a year. They consider that this presentation is in line with the spirit of the Fellowship. I shall finish by thanking Rebecca Smith, William Cooke and Margaret Keeping for their contributions to this Newsletter.

Notes from abroad

One of the delights of the activities of the Fellowship is the frequent unearthing of new material concerning Edward.

This letter came from Rebecca Smith, who contacted the Chairman out of the blue and is a descendant of W. Elsey, a Lincoln College friend of ET. He went on to become a bishop in Australia and Rebecca came across the letters in his archive that she investigated in Perth. She was on a quick visit, as she lives in Herefordshire. It looks as if there are probably other letters, but the ones she saw stop after a few years. Elsey warrants a mention in George Thomas' biography.

Rebecca writes

"My mother, Sybil Scorer, was born in 1920. She had a great-aunt Sarah Ann, who married William Edward Elsey in 1879. Their son, also William Edward (Ned) was the Bishop of Kalgoorlie. Ned was born in 1880 and went to Lincoln College, Oxford. There he was a close friend of Edward Thomas – a fact of which I was completely unaware. My mother regularly reminded us that our most august relative was a Bishop, and when I found myself invited to a reunion of old friends in Western Australia, I realised that here was my chance to find out more. The State Library in Perth turned out to have a very extensive collection of papers relating to Bishop Elsey, including large quantities transported from England to Australia when he emigrated in 1914. Starting at the beginning, which was letters from the year 1900, I almost instantly found myself drawn to a letter on blue paper, written in a characterful hand, and signed 'Edward Thomas'. Surely not, I thought. As I found more (over twenty in total) similar letters, their content seemed to suggest that this was indeed the famous poet. In some excitement, I moved across the deserted Reading Room to the library's computers, and googled the man. Yes, he went to Lincoln College, and yes his dates fitted exactly. I called over the nearest librarian, a young woman in her early thirties perhaps, who had never heard of Thomas. Undaunted I went to another desk, tended by an older woman, who was better informed. Together we wrote a note for the Chief Archivist describing my discovery. I went back to the boxes and folders, and spent two days copying out innumerable letters and diary entries, in order to learn more about my grandfather's cousin Ned. The correspondence with Thomas appears to have fizzled out within a few years, Elsey became a High Anglican priest in Stepney, damaging his health with the demands of the work amidst the extreme poverty of the area. When he was recruited to go to Australia, much of the motivation seems to have been a way of improving his physical condition. I learned that he had been a Bush Brother in Williams, some distance south of Perth. During the First World War, he had remained there, one of a small handful of men dedicated to driving around an immense area, ministering to recent immigrants in far-flung corners of the state. In 1919, he was installed as Bishop, in Kalgoorlie, a gold-mining town of considerable size and importance at the time. I had known nothing whatsoever

about Stepney or Bush Brothers before arriving in Perth. I went to Kojonup, for the reunion, and was delighted to find pictures of Ned in the library there. A huge coincidence, and the first images I had ever seen of him. Then I went to Kalgoorlie, and visited his church, which seemed little changed from his time – but which had no references whatsoever to a Bishop who served it for 31 years. The Bishop and his wife, Cecilia, had a son John Kenneth Edward Elsey who died in 2009. He is buried in Karrakatta Cemetery, Nedlands, Western Australia, the same as his father. I will continue to pursue whatever researches I can, from here in England. I regret that I did not copy every single one of Thomas's letters. It is quite possible that I'll get back there again perhaps at the end of 2017"

117 Atheldene Road Earlsfield, London SW.

14.xi.1900

My dear Elsey

I should much like to hear from you, though I dare not remind you that you owe me a letter, after treating you so carelessly at Oxford. You will not believe me, but I would far rather have spent an evening with you than the noisy revelry I actually had.

You will see that I have changed my address. I had to leave home a fortnight ago and I find it a very hard struggle to keep things going by means of 'literature'. I am just too far from town to see my friends often, and just too near to be in the country. Perhaps you know Earlsfield: it is quite near Wimbledon. I married nearly two years ago (very few people at Lincoln know this) and I am living here with my wife and a child you would adore. When you next come to town, I beg you to let me know so that I may arrange for you to come to lunch. My wife is already an admirer of yours; for one thing she thinks you are the only respectable friend I had at Oxford and she doesn't use 'respectable' in its opprobrious sense.

But what a foolish letter is this. If you saw me writing it, you would think it was a dull holiday task. The fact is you spoil me for letter-writing by answering so rarely. Moreover, how can I write to you after a lapse of two or three months? You have probably forgotten me, forgotten even that I exist. It is as if an animal (whom we do not credit with speech, etc) were to try to talk to a man. 'The wonder,' as Dr Johnson said, 'is that he can do it at all.'

I really won't go on in this wretched way, for as a 'literary man' I have a reputation (if only for a kind of pleasing nonsense) which I can't afford to lose. I have sent several messages to you through Curran, Davies and O'Brien; I hope they reached you. Until I hear from you in return, I remain

That Thing

Edward Thomas 117 Atheldene Road, Earlsfield, London SW.

117 Atheldene Road, Earlsfield, London SW.

16.xi.1900

My dear Elsey

Your letter is delightful. Few things used to leave so pleasant a savour in my memory as a visit from you – and your letter is almost as good as a visit. You have taken a most Christian and friendly revenge for my silly note. Speaking of revenges, ‘Forgive him and enjoy it,’ says Sir Thomas Browne; you have made me enjoy it too. May you write me many such letters and may I be compelled to write the life of Nebuchadnezzar if I be not grateful! If my son had any sense of duty, he would be grateful too. As it is, he sends in return a huge smile that could almost be sent in tissue paper by letter post. My wife apologises by only sending kindest regards. (What are they?)

Thanks for the College news and congratulations on your goal at soccer. I hope you will always speedily reach all goals, except that called ‘the heavenly goal’. What does such a jolly old lover of port as the Rector mean by ruling the College like a preparatory school? But I’m glad I escaped lighting a bonfire. Otherwise I should have liked to be at the Gaudy, though I begin to think Oxford is best as a memory. Of course everyone was kind when I was up last month; only they seemed to find Oxford merely a place where they could make a beast of themselves without molestation. I suppose I have no right to throw the first stone, but I think of Oxford more reverently than that. No place I ever lived in had such personality as Oxford and not merely because it has such memories. Oxford was worthy of love for its own sake. In my fancy the city is inseparable from the country round – Hinksey, Boar’s Hill and other scenes we knew. The city is lovelier on account of the country, the country dearer on account of the city. But I am not in my best elegiac mood, so I’ll just sing ‘For Auld Lang Syne’ and drink to you metaphorically in Stephens Blue Black ink.

Ugh! How cold it is. I need an Oxford fire (but can’t afford it, now that coal is 30/- a ton. Did you know that? I know a lot of things now and find a liberal education in furnishing a tiny flat.) Some Oxford tea (4 cups) or brandy (ad lib), and a lot of stupid, healthy, happy faces. Those are the things to warm the heart into ‘a solid core of heat’. But instead I am writing on ‘Epitaphs’ and ‘November’ - they make me colder still. And this neighbourhood makes it worse. It is like writing on mourning paper! In this street I think it must always be November or January. The characteristics of the month I observe to be

- i. The milkmen are all hoarse
- ii. All carts sound like hearses in the slush

iii. The sky is the colour of a potato just dug up

iv. The sun died recently, and having made no will, his effects were sold for a song to a gas company (who found them too antiquated for use) and so on: fill in the picture with sepia and a little Oxford mud.

I live chiefly on my imagination, and have just imagined that there is a row of poplars close by, with golden leaves and the sun amongst them.

At present there is nothing I want (ie can pay for) in Oxford. If there were I should like you to do it. Is there anything I could do for you in town? I have by the way a translation of Gude's Pol Econ (which Edwards recommends and it is very useful for Schools) which I will send you if you like.

I do hope you will always write when you feel inclined (oftener if possible). If you like I will soon write again, for I am

Ever sincerely yours

Edward Thomas

117 Atheldene Road, Earlsfield, London SW

4.xii.1900

My dear Elsey

Pray do not ask me to believe you mine sincerely at the end of your letters, but sign yourself as you did in your last letter but one, for a signature like that is better far than a glass of whiskey toddy. Still I was awfully glad to hear from you. I would have written before, but for hard times, and even now I can only send you the usual begging letter – begging for one from you. At present I am quite unnerved by reading the 'Poems' of 16 longhaired men and shorthaired women, for a review. What an evil world it is that such vices as poetry should be on the increase. I feel incensed (?) to write an 'Anti-Areopagatica' or 'The Reviewer's Lament'. It is the only vice of which I ever cured myself. The way I did it was this:

On a certain day in '97 or thereabouts I bought my first pipe. (I had one in '87 but for good reasons that doesn't count) and smoked it full of some dark tobacco.

And then, 'O world! O life! O time!' I discovered pain and sorrow and something else, with the result that I never versed again. So as far as that vice is concerned I am an angel in white pyjamas.

I am glad to hear you keep the Davenant going and I longed to hear the Gubby's 'Lans Rurio Anglici' though I fear I don't very much admire his writing.

Good old Curran! He always repents of his good (i.e. unco guid) intentions when he has done his stomach justice with good wine. I suppose you were as discreet as usual after the Fours.

You tantalise me verily by describing your walks to Boar's Hill. I can hardly live without such walks and should like to convince myself that the country could as little do without me as I without it, but alas!

'The One remains, the many change and pass.' N.B. that is a line of Shelley (my favourite sinner in the vice of verses).

Do you ever read Charles Lamb now?

By the way, penniless as I am now I yet want Blackwell's Catalogue of secondhand books. Will you send it to me?

If you are too busy now don't forget to write to me when you get back to Lincolnshire, and now 'Success to every gentleman who lives in Lincolnshire.' (Sing that to the right tune for my sake.)

Yours ever heartily

Edward Thomas

same address

16.xii.1900

My dear Elsey

Many thanks for your letter. I had not forgotten your earlier one, in fact I sat down to answer it yesterday, but had to retire. I only wish I could have got up to Holborn in time to shake your hand, or that you were staying longer in town. I see very few people nowadays, except my friend Hagues (?) who is generally to be found ill in bed with a store of jests good and bad, and I haven't seen one Lincoln man this vac.

...

I have never been to Ramsgate but my wife has many friends there. Still I know Westgate (which is Ramsgate minus the shrimps and the gossip scandal), and the country is very fine. I walked thence to Canterbury last Easter.

...

I have absolutely no news and am in that unimaginative state in which I can't write without facts. I can't even tell the stern unbending lie. 'The Chronicle' gives

me a fair amount of work; the worst of it is the papers are so slack in paying. If I had been paid immediately for my work I should have earned £28 in 6 week, which is not very bad. As it is I am starving half the time. Luckily the infant doesn't starve. He grows terribly and has got legs already very much like Crabbie's, the Varsity threequarter. I hope he will get his blue some day, and when you are only bishop you will be very envious.

...

several articles in Crampton's Magazine about books. Exiles at Play. Epitaph as a form of literature, Elizabethan Pen and Ink Sketches, perhaps Two Oxford Studies...

Chaucer and Malory editing.

To Elsey at Baumber House

Earlsfield. 10.1.1901

My dear Elsey

I ought to have written long before to thank you for your comical Christmas card, but I have recently been either too busy or too bored to write. This cold weather, too, troubles me very much, for I can't afford a big enough fire to oppose it, in fact if I did not think you were rather poorly off for woods in Lincolnshire, I should beg you to send me a consignment of holly and oak for fires.

Towards half past two in the morning (when for two or three hours you have been dreaming of Aristotle and mince pies and comic recitations) I begin to find it too cold to read or write or smoke and so have to go to bed with half my work undone. I have just had to review some 'Latin classics in English' by an American, whom I fairly jumped on in order to get warm. The beast! It's a scheme to teach sweeps to quote Virgil inappropriately. But hunting is a much better way of getting warm and I envy you.

Work comes in more slowly now but I'm going to make myself immortal in Crampton's Magazine by writing a chatty paper on books every month. I shall call it Horce Otiose or some such thing. What do you advise me to call myself? For it is not to be signed by my name.

Is Stanford living near you now? If he is, please remember me to him.

Did you hear of Edwards's 'unfortunate incident' last term? He reported that M. of Pembroke had regularly attended his lectures and had seldom if ever missed an essay. M. is the idler of ?? so the Dons smelt a rat and asking him what

lectures he attended, he answered that he could not remember; and he was forced to confess that he had never done an essay for Edwards. He was afterwards told of Edwards's report! Poor M! Poor Edwards!

The only news is that the baby continues to enjoy his cold bath, which I don't. He and Mrs Thomas wish to be remembered. I would write more and better if I could, but I have toothache and must fall to prayers or something. Go with best wishes for this stupid century, I am ever yours heartily, Edward Thomas

March 1901 – long letter, not copied, describing house fire.

13 Feb 01

My dear Elsey

Some evil spirit (cui cognomen Curran est) whispered yesterday that you had been down with peritonitis. I don't know how to spell it luckily, but I know it's a (Greek word) and an abominable thing. I can't believe it. Anyhow he said you were now out of danger. Please confirm this by a line if you can't write more. My own difficulties will seem light if I know you are well. I failed to get the secretaryship and am trying for another, without much hope. The cold of this winter has seemed very terrible in this house and we have suffered much. But next Wednesday we move to 7 Blandsfield Street, Nightingale Lane, Clapham Common, London SW. Don't forget; but I hope you will let me have good news before Wednesday.

Everyone is suffering with you. I hear that Davenant is at the point of death. Naturally.

My wife sends anxious good wishes; likewise Thomas minor.

Excuse a short letter. I'm busy packing and am still in very difficult straits.

Ever yours

Edward Thomas

7 Nightingale Parade, Balham, SW

12.V.1901

My dear Elsey

A London Sunday differs from an Oxford Sunday: it is abominable, partly because one writes letters; but it is a trifle better because one does not write them in the Union with a bowler on. I think it criminal in an Oxford friend to write to me on

Sunday; I hope you won't mind my writing from London today, for I have had a very busy week and a very disappointing one. I thought I had regular work, but yesterday I was booted, and am a castaway once more. You may hear that His Majesty Ed VII has been scandalously libelled, that there has been a scene at Westminster, but believe me nothing happens nowadays in London. Cabmen swear, parsons croak and the result is a rather melancholy noise that keeps me awake at night. Meanwhile I go on writing in the old fruitless way and am no more famous than I was. My only incitement to work and achieve fame is the prospect of shaming those who snub me every day. I live a very peaceful, though not a tranquil, life, observing most of the Commandments, except 'thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house'. I covet nearly every house with a large garden. In fact I have spent over six weeks in describing (in an essay) how much I covet a garden very near here, a garden with an ugly old statue overgrown by moss and covered in snail shells broken there by thrushes. I coveted it when I was six, and I should feel as if I were breaking a commandment if I didn't covet it now. Last night when I had finished the essay, I was reading Matthew Arnold's 'Thyrsis' a poem that has become very dear to me, largely because of its Oxford reminiscences. 'In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the sun' he says, and lest they should entirely vanish, I very much want to come up soon. I am so poor, however, that I might only be able to come for the day; if I did come, could you spare just one morning for a walk to Boar's Hill? We would go straight from the station. Could you spare net Friday morning? If so, let me know, and I will try to come, though of course I am not nearly sure I can.

With best wishes from us all

Ever yours

Edward Thomas

7 Nightingale Parade, Balham, SW

23.vii.1901

My dear Elsey

I have been away to Kent for a short holiday and have otherwise been very busy. But I haven't forgotten you and even if you haven't time I want you to write and say the same. Tell me about the country, for although I have just seen some delicious orchards I cannot remember them because the sound of London is so great. Your happy pen should bring them all back again.

I continue to have a fair amount of work, but so far I am no nearer success. I am to have an essay on 'Books and Inns' in Literature next month and am on the lookout for a picture or two of old inns for illustration. Do you know any?

I hope you are having a pleasant summer with even more cherries than I and that you are now perfectly well.

Don't mistake this for a letter. It is merely a card with my best wishes and those of my wife and the jolly infant, who are still away in Kent.

Ever yours heartily

Edward Thomas

7 Nightingale Parade, Balham, SW

1 Oct 1901

My dear Elsey

Will you meet the 11.8 on Friday morning? Then we will go just as far as you like, perhaps Boar's Hill would be too far, since I am booked for the rest of the day at 2 or 2.15. The weather is on our side.

Ever yours Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

21.xii.1901

My dear Elsey

Please remember me when you get this book. I have had and still have very bad luck and am in no mood for cheerful letters or even for imposing my melancholy on others. Write if you can.

Ever yours heartily

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

2.iii.1902

My dear Elsey

I have persuaded myself that you have misdated your last letter, because it seems the day before yesterday when it came. For the interval has been filled – for me – by hopes and disappointments, attempts and failures. Persistence is the one virtue I retain. No sooner has one editor disappointed me than I turn to another. I come up to the surface as regularly as a porpoise – and down again too. Of

course I have consolations. I have letters – sometimes, and I have my son, whose name is Philip Mervyn.

But I dare not write a long letter to a member of a small college with two rowing blues – you probably only read *The Sportsman* – I never do. Perhaps you will find time to do me a small service – I am selling my books, for I am heavily in arrears. So I want to know if you would sell my copy of Stubbs's *Constitutional History* to Blackwell. If you don't mind doing it, will you send me a postcard by return; and then I will forward the books.

I have very little news, except that I shall probably publish my second book in the course of the year. It is to be called *Horæ Solitariae*, and is dedicated to O.M.Edwards. You must advertise it for me later on.

Please remember me to Stanford, Hodges, Wrottersley and Curran. I don't know if Curran would care to hear from me again. Perhaps you would give him my address.

My one success is in my garden. It is an acre and not half an acre, and I am gradually creating it anew. The snowdrops I planted in November are now in flower, so my garden carries me on from month to month like a pleasant correspondence.

With best wishes from us

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

19.i.1902

My dear Elsey

Many thanks for your note. I no longer hope to be able to answer anyone's letters, so I can only ask you to let me have any news there may be – for instance, did you get your Group last term?

Yesterday I walked to Staplehurst which is 12 miles from here, to find Oyler, and then I learned that his family of Oylers didn't live there at all. I am so entirely without any acquaintances of my own age that I looked forward to seeing him. If you know his address, perhaps you would let me know.

I reviewed Edwards's new history of 'Wales' in the Academy recently and have been hearing from him. But I suppose he isn't your tutor at all.

I spend my days in writing useless essays and in catching moles. At least I can say that I have some talents for the latter and I even catch them on the Sabbath.

Notwithstanding, I have made some friends among the clergy here, including one fine sporting rector about 10 miles away.

By the way, I wish you would ask the Lincoln porter to readdress all letters to this place and not to town.

Don't forget. I will send him a tip some day. Remember me to my friends and believe me ever yours, Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted

4.iii.1902

My dear Elsey

I have quite a superstitious love of crossed letters, and yours was more welcome even than usual...selling the books...And by the way, you haven't got a single barrel for sale, have you? Or know anyone who has? I want one badly. Anything that isn't a muzzle loader will do. Perhaps the gunsmith in the High has got one. Yours ever Edward Thomas. NB I don't expect you to get a gun with the proceeds of these books!

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

27.iv.02

My dear Elsey

I believe you owe me a letter. If so, it is unpardonable that you haven't written. If I owe you, it is another thing. What have you done in the vac since the boatrace? Anything? By the way, I reviewed the subby's book (and liked it immensely) in the 'Daily Chronicle'. I quoted Virgil and the printers misprinted. Otherwise perhaps the subby was pleased.

Very soon I shall publish another book, I fear. Its name is 'Beside the Still Waters' and I hope it will come out before the term is over because I want my friends to buy it. I shall get Blackwelll to advertise it.

I shall very likely come up in a fortnight or so. Do you know of a cheap bedroom? Or can I get the guestroom? Let me know as soon as you can – perhaps Stanford or Hodges have got a spare bedroom in his digs; but I don't want to pay more than 2/6 or 3/- a night (no board of course). You are still in College I suppose. Otherwise I should like to dig near you.

My luck is better than it was. Write at once and talk about yourself, as I have about myself.

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

11.v.1902

My dear Elsey

I am now not at all sure that I can get to Oxford this term. But I shall try – if I do come I shall be grateful to Stanford if he can get me a room.

Just now I am busy correcting the proofs of my books There was some trouble about a title and the publisher (Duckworth) has now gone back to my original suggestion – *HORÆ SOLITARIÆ*. I hope you will mention it to anyone who knows me or is likely to buy it. The publisher is so doubtful about its success that he can't afford to advertise it so I have to advertise it myself as I am doing now. If you don't mind the trouble, a good way of advertising a book is to go into every bookshop you pass and ask if they have got it. They certainly won't have it (except at Blackwell's), but after you have asked for it, they probably will. I am sorry to suggest these rather sordid things to you, but great deal depends on the sale of the book and I cannot afford to be squeamish.

I hope the elder Milburn is better now – the Eight must go up this year.

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

6.vi.02

My dear Elsey

I can't get up to Oxford this term, so just a word to let you know that my book *Horæ Solitariae* – has just been published. Please drink its health if only in cold water. I don't know if you would like it and I can't afford to send you a copy.

If you should see Hodges you might ask him when his viva is, because I may be in Oxford in the vac.

Remember me to everyone

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone.

19.vi.02

My dear Elsey

I ought to have written to say how my best wishes go with you with the Schools, though that is nothing compared with what you did for me in 1900 at this time. I should have been ploughed if it hadn't been for your luncheons, though perhaps I should have got a first without that bottle of fiz. Well, you have worked and are bound to do pretty well. Let me know. And when is your Viva? It does not seem very likely that I shall reach Oxford this summer, but if I do I should like to see you – and what do you think of *Horæ Solitariae*? Rot? I have had few reviews – one stupid fierce one in the *St James Gazette*. The book is selling quite well, considering the season. I hope you have pointed out its extraordinary merit to Hodges and such people. I believe you have for I hear it is selling in Oxford.

I was in town last week and saw Joe O'Brien for a few minutes. He has a nice moustache, but otherwise he is as good a fellow as he ever was. I never hear anything of Curran. I suppose he is still a very great man and very well dressed? And is Stanford still living the life of a bad Limerick? NB I believe he at heart more like Lucy Gray. Tell him so.

Is Edwards up? I sent him a copy of my book late in May and he has taken no notice of it.

We all send you good wishes

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone

21.iii.1903

My dear Elsey

I ought to have written to you before, but I have been hoping you would come down and shall continue to hope. It is splendid news that you are busy and like your work. You have fine opportunities for doing everything except making money and I think your kind of work and farming are two noblest employments open to a man – as for me, I am very busy too. I have been asked to write a big book on Oxford for Messrs A. and C. Black and have consented. It is to be finished on June 30, or ought to be. So I have very little time to give to anything else. The book is to have a number of coloured illustrations by John Fulleylove R.I. and will cost a guinea. I had to be in Oxford for a few days, but I saw nobody you know except Curran and Wrottesley and nobody I knew except one, a Radley master.

I had a letter from Joe O'Brien yesterday. To my great surprise it was dated from near Calcutta, where he has a good berth.

My family flourishes and wishes to be remembered to you.

Write as often as you can

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

Rose Acre, Bearsted, nr Maidstone

14.v.03

My dear Elsey

I am very sorry I did not write before. But it was quite impossible and even now I can only say as I have to say to everyone, that I am too stupid to write about anything but Oxford. Imagine then what the book will be like. It will not be good even for me. I have been compelled to put down every silly thing that occurred to me, and what is worse, every sillier thing that I could wring out of my brain, day after day. And I am longing for my old condition, in spite of its (slightly) greater penury. The necessity of finishing the book has so pressed me that I have written even faster than I need, and could send in the last chapter several weeks before it is due (on June 30). After that I shall be free and I hope you will try to spend a day or a week here, or rather in a house on the village green which I hope to enter at Midsummer. We shall both welcome you.

Yours ever

Edward Thomas

A NOTE ON EDWARD THOMAS by William Cooke

Two minor stories concerning Edward Thomas continue to recur but may not be all they seem. The first originated with Joseph Conrad and was reported in John Moore's biography:

Conrad tells a story of how once he came across his little son Boris [sic] and Edward Thomas fishing 'in intense absorption' with a line without a hook in a pond which had no fish in it. 'Thomas smiled with shadowy irony, but he sat on, fishing,' and Conrad left the two philosophers to their contented reverie.¹

The episode resurfaces in the latest biography by Jean Moorcroft Wilson:

"Apparently on one occasion, while visiting Joseph Conrad and his family later in life, he sat happily fishing for hours with Conrad's son, Borys, though neither had a hook attached to their lines and the pond was guiltless of fish".²

When writing my critical biography I had intended to mention the story and wrote to Borys Conrad to see if he had any further details to add. His reply took me by surprise:

"I fear that I cannot help you much: I remember Edward Thomas – though only vaguely – but can assure you that he only made two – or maybe three – visits to our home, and I certainly never went fishing with him".

"In conversation with my brother this evening I asked him whether he remembered ET. He has no recollection of him at all, although he remembers the name. He is nearly ten years younger than I am so that he would have been a very small boy at that period".³

After such a denial I omitted all reference to the tale. It's a charming story – but did it happen?

The second anecdote was told by Robert Frost. When he and his family were in England, his daughter Lesley produced an in-house magazine called *The Bouquet* to which the four Frost children and close friends (and both Frost and Thomas) contributed. Lesley's notebook of the period (1914) contains several early drafts of what she later included in the magazine. One of them, 'What a Swallow Is', appeared as 'What a Swallow Must Be' in the July 1914 issue and began:

"I think somebody's bow and arrow must have flown away together. I never look at a swallow but what I think so. Some little child with a very tiny bow, like those I used to make for Marjorie [her sister] out of the limbs of my large bow".⁴

¹ *The Life and Letters of Edward Thomas*, p.137.

² *From Adlestrop to Arras*, p.26.

³ Letter to author, 28 October 1968.

⁴ Quoted in Lesley Lee Frost, *An Adventure in Poetry, 1900-1918*, pp.121-2.

Her daughter, Lesley Lee Francis, continues the story:

“From this brief but imaginative tale, its opening simile ... was one Lesley was proud and pleased to give to Edward Thomas when he asked for and later included it in his poem ‘Haymaking’:

While over them shrill shrieked in his fierce glee
The swift with wings and tail as sharp and narrow
As if the bow had flown off with the arrow”.

Elizabeth Sergeant, in her Frost biography, while she seems to have been unaware of the notebook entry, nevertheless correctly attributes the source of the simile to Lesley, noting that Robert told her that Edward ‘asked if he might use this fine simile in a poem’.⁵

Lesley Lee Francis then adds this note to her reference to the Sergeant biography:

The English critic Andrew Motion disagrees, claiming the simile is an adaptation of Jefferies’s remark about hounds: “The sinewy back bends like a bow, but a bow that, instead of an arrow, shoots itself” (*The Poetry of Edward Thomas*, pp.97-100; he is citing Richard Jefferies, *The Amateur Poacher* (1897)).

Motion is right to be sceptical, though an even closer source is Thomas’s own *Light and Twilight* (1911) in which he refers to the flight of the swift ‘which was as if the arrow and bow had flown away together’.⁶ Perhaps Thomas had given a copy of his book to Frost (or Lesley) and she had come across the simile there. Years later, in recounting the story, Frost may have simply confused who was asking permission from whom.

William Cooke

⁵ *Trial by Existence* (1960), p.135.

⁶ *Light and Twilight* (1911), p.133.

Thomas's 'sprained ankle' poems.

The serious ankle sprain that Edward Thomas sustained, running down the Shoulder of Mutton hill at New Year, 1915, had positive consequences. Confined to the house he began to write prolifically, confirming his 1914 beginnings as a poet and rapidly developing. He said he wrote well when in pain.

But - **The Lofty Sky** - the title says it all: what an ordeal it must have been for Thomas being unable to walk outdoors. The poem is about remembering, but he encounters some problem, some flaw in the memory or in himself, implying that it is impossible to go back - in reality or just in his memory I don't know. Edna Longley recommends we look carefully at the line-breaks.

The Lofty Sky has a vibrant rhythm and energy - pent-up energy. Longley sees it as having a strong Romantic theme.

To-day I want the sky,
The tops of the high hills,
Above the last man's house,
His hedges, and his cows,
Where, if I will, I look
Down even on sheep and rook,
And of all things that move
See buzzards only above:-
Past all trees, past furze
And thorn, where nought deters
The desire of the eye

For sky, nothing but sky.
I sicken of the woods
And all the multitudes
Of hedge-trees. They are no more
Than weeds upon this floor
Of the river of air
Leagues deep, leagues wide, where
I am like a fish that lives
In weeds and mud and gives
What's above him no thought.
I might be a tench for aught
That I can do to-day
Down on the wealden clay.
Even the tench has days
When he floats up and plays
Among the lily leaves
And sees the sky, or grieves
Not if he nothing sees:
While I, I know that trees

Under that lofty sky
Are weeds, fields mud, and I
Would arise and go far
To where the lilies are.

A Private, written on 6th and 7th January, has the first reference, I think, to the war, and it seems he altered it from its first draft, which referred to 'an old man' and implied the Boer war. What a powerful message it gives about those thousands lost and never found, or unrecognizable.

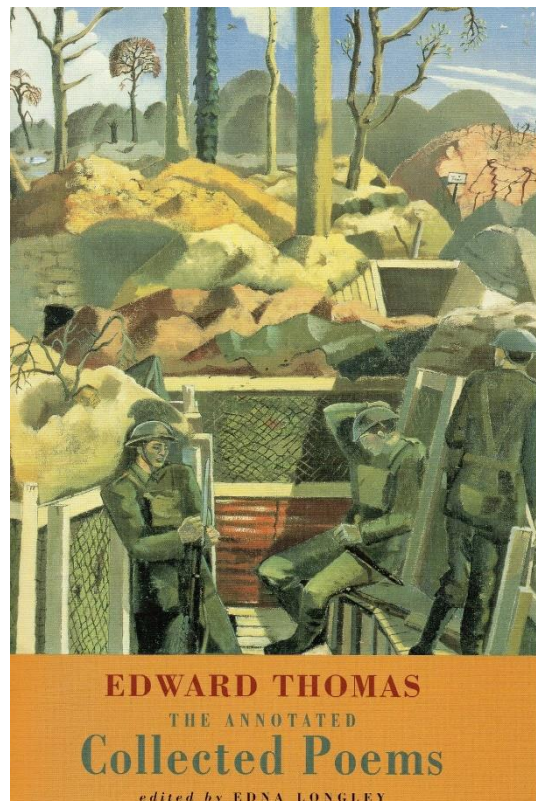
This ploughman dead in battle slept out of doors
Many a frosty night, and merrily
Answered staid drinkers, good bedmen, and all bores:
'At Mrs Greenland's Hawthorn Bush,' said he,
'I slept.' None knew which bush. Above the town,
Beyond 'The Drover', a hundred spot the down
In Wiltshire. And where now at last he sleeps
More sound in France—that, too, he secret keeps.

'Adlestrop' and 'Tears' - more 'sprained ankle' poems, both written or at least begun on the 8th January.

We may think there is nothing new to say about 'Adlestrop', but Edna Longley's notes to her edition of the Collected Poems sees this intense juxtaposition of composition as showing an important development. 'Tears' has history and ambiguity, reflecting the violence of hounds and soldiers as well as their beauty, and perhaps stirrings of conscience about the enlisting issue.

Adlestrop - and perhaps that's why it's so easy to love - is an appreciation of England 'aesthetically', something about which, after the epiphany of the autumn before, Thomas was perhaps beginning to feel a little uncomfortable.

How wonderful that he could use his memories and his field notebooks to create these works while sitting in a deck-chair in the living room that day, with his leg propped up, taking up most of the room and no doubt grumbling at everything Helen was doing.



Bloodaxe Books 2008.

Tears

It seems I have no tears left.
They should have fallen---
Their ghosts, if tears have ghosts, did fall---that day
When twenty hounds streamed by me, not yet combed out
But still all equals in their rage of gladness
Upon the scent, made one, like a great dragon
In Blooming Meadow that bends towards the sun
And once bore hops: and on that other day
When I stepped out from the double-shadowed
Tower into an April morning, stirring and sweet
And warm. Strange solitude was there and silence.
A mightier charm than any in the Tower
Possessed the courtyard. They were changing guard,
Soldiers in line, young English countrymen,
Fair-haired and ruddy, in white tunics.
Drums and fifes were playing 'The British Grenadiers'.
The men, the music piercing that solitude
And silence, told me truths I had not dreamed,
And have forgotten since their beauty passed.

Beauty', another 'sprained ankle' poem.

This is my favourite Thomas poem. A miniature eighteen-line autobiography, an honest self-appraisal, a misery-memoir consciously and humorously undermined and

upturned. A not-quite sonnet -currently fashionable - retaining the punch of the mood and tone change and letting it blossom. Those birds, always exact to their 'jizz' but meaning much more:

'The birds may represent alternative ways of dealing with neurosis; a regressive resort to nostalgia, wailing for something lost; or progress towards the grounded selfhood phrased as 'home and love'. Longley

WHAT does it mean? Tired, angry, and ill at ease,
No man, woman, or child alive could please
Me now. And yet I almost dare to laugh
Because I sit and frame an epitaph-
'Here lies all that no one loved of him
And that loved no one.' Then in a trice that whim
Has wearied. But, though I am like a river
At fall of evening when it seems that never
Has the sun lighted it or warmed it, while
Cross breezes cut the surface to a file,
This heart, some fraction of me, happily
Floats through a window even now to a tree
Down in the misting, dim-lit, quiet vale;
Not like a pewit that returns to wail
For something it has lost, but like a dove
That slants unanswering to its home and love.
There I find my rest, and through the dusk air
Flies what yet lives in me. Beauty is there.

Margaret Keeping

Operations news

Report on Committee discussions in 2016

The Committee met four times in 2016; three times as the full Committee and once as a sub group to finalise the presentation of the 2015 accounts for the 2016 AGM.

The main topics discussed were; arrangements for the trip to Agny in 2017, developing and finalising the agreement between Petersfield Museum/The Wilton Steer Family/The Fellowship for the long term loan of the Tim Wilton Steer collection, the Edward Cawston Thomas poetry prize, involvement with Friends' of Steep Church, possible increases to future subscription levels due to the every rising cost of printing and postage and the reasons for the cancellation of the study day and the weekend at Borwick Hall.

Meeting of the Northern/North Western Group of the E T F with the Friends of the Dymock Poets

The Group met for the second time on 9th August in the Pleasant Buttery at Levens Hall near Carnforth and were delighted to greet a new member, who had spotted our item in an earlier Newsletter of the FDP. Now we are six.

Jeff Cooper had prepared an enjoyable potted biography of Gordon Bottomley which triggered lively recollections by some of us of the joint weekend of the ETF and the Arthur Ransome Society a few years ago. On a trip from our base at Borwick Hall, we had visited GB's house The Sheiling and had been invited to enjoy a walk round the garden. GB's friendship with Edward had of course been one of the topics of discussion.

Conversational crossovers at Levens covered music and other common interests - no topic is discouraged and we were so busy chatting and drinking tea that a kindly waitress had to remind us that, if we wanted to eat, we should hasten to order as the kitchen was closing shortly.

Our next meeting is scheduled for 11th April at Holden Clough Nursery, Holden, Bolton by Bowland BB7 4PF, which is not far from Clitheroe, at a time to be fixed - probably about 12.30. The date is the closest we can manage to the Centenary of the death of ET, who will be starting focus of discussion and those coming are encouraged to bring a piece of his work - prose or verse - which is of particular significance or appeal to you.

If you wish to come or want further information, please telephone me on 01625 529404. Suggestions for future venues are always welcome - as are new members of our friendly group. We would like to get to know more of you on a social basis and to share and learn more from our common interests.

Valerie Haworth.

Diary

Cardiff University Conference to mark centenary of Edward Thomas' death.

17th – 21st April 2017 - All Day

Cardiff University holds an important collection of Thomas's manuscript materials and letters. For further details and booking see Cardiff University web site. (www.cardiff.ac.uk)

Petersfield Music Festival

17th to 25th March 2017 in particular Friday 17th - March Edward Thomas 1878 – 1917 a centenary concert.

Two exhibitions will be open during the Festival: new images by Petersfield Photographic Society, inspired by Edward Thomas's life and work; and books and documents from the collection held by Petersfield Museum, together with items from the national Edward Thomas archive.

See Festival web site for details and booking (www.petersfieldmusicalfestival.org.uk)

Fellowship Study Day and Formal Opening of the Tim Wilton Steer Study Centre at Petersfield Museum

10th June 2017 - Full day. Details of programme and speakers to follow

Two forthcoming books published to coincide with the Edward Thomas centenary 2017 by Enitharmon Press

UNDER THE SAME MOON: EDWARD THOMAS AND THE ENGLISH LYRIC, by Edna Longley

A hundred years ago Edward Thomas was killed in the Battle of Arras (April 1917). The reputation of his poetry has never been higher. Professor Edna Longley has already edited Thomas's poems and prose. She now marks his centenary, and adds to the growing field of Thomas studies, with this close reading of his poetry. Longley places the lyric poem at the centre of Thomas's poetry and of his thinking about poetry. Drawing on Thomas's own remarkable critical writings, she argues that his importance to emergent 'modern poetry' has yet to be fully appreciated. Thomas, as a leading reviewer of poetry in the early 1900s, was deeply engaged with the traditions of poetry in the English language, as well as with contemporary poetry. *Under the Same Moon* takes a fresh look at Thomas's relation to the Romantic poets, to Great War poetry, to Robert Frost, to W. B. Yeats. By making detailed comparisons between their poems, Longley shows how the aesthetics of Thomas and Frost complement one another across the Atlantic. She argues, perhaps controversially, that we should think about Great War poetry from the perspective of Thomas as 'war poet' and critic of war poetry. And she suggests that to focus on Thomas is to open up poetic relations in the 'Anglo-Celtic' archipelago. *Under the Same Moon* is also a study of lyric poetry: its sources, structures and forms; the kinds of meaning it creates. Longley asks what exactly happened when, in December 1914, Thomas morphed from a prose-writer into a poet; and she approaches the lyric from a psychological angle by comparing Thomas with Philip Larkin.

£25 hardback, April 2017. To order, please email: info@enitharmon.co.uk, telephone Enitharmon Press on 020 7430 0844, send a cheque payable to Enitharmon Press to 10 Bury Place, London WC1A 2JL, or visit the Enitharmon website page with this link: www.enitharmon.co.uk/Edna Longley

EDWARD THOMAS: A LIFE IN PICTURES, by Richard Emeny

In June 2017, to coincide with our study day in Petersfield, Enitharmon Press will be publishing the long awaited illustrated biography of Edward Thomas by the Fellowship's chairman, Richard Emeny. This is the culmination of many years' study of the poet's life and work and draws also on Richard's extensive knowledge of Thomas's family, friends, literary associates, publications and the places he either lived or visited. Offering in some ways a revisionist biographical portrait, the book combines the story of Edward's life with numerous illustrations, including photographs, printed material, maps and original letters, many of which have never been published before. It will add significantly to what is already known of Thomas and his family before and after his death by putting his biography into a visual and historical context.

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

Those of you who wish to subscribe to Richard Emeny's book in advance of publication may opt to have your names included in a 'List of Subscribers' to be printed at the end of the book. The publication price will be £30, which is inclusive of postage within the UK. To subscribe, please email: info@enitharmon.co.uk, telephone Enitharmon Press on 020 7430 0844, send a cheque payable to Enitharmon Press to 10 Bury Place, London WC1A 2JL, or visit the Enitharmon website page with this link: www.enitharmon.co.uk/Emeny-Edward Thomas

Roads Shining Like River Up Hill After Rain

Edward Thomas 'Ghost Shards' for choir and 'cello

Edward Thomas was killed on 9th April (Easter Monday) 1917 in Arras on the western front when a German shell pass so close to his body that the air was sucked out of his lungs and he died without a mark on him. The contents of his pockets, sent home to his wife, contained his diary, a photograph, and a letter on the back of which were scribbled some fragments of incomplete poetry including the lines:

*'Where any turn may lead to Heaven
Or any corner may hide Hell
Roads shining like river up hill after rain.'*

In collaboration with nature writer Robert Macfarlane a text has been fashioned from fragments of his collected poetry (including the lines found in his pocket) as a metaphorical journey from his home village of Steep to the Western Front. It uses the poem 'Roads' as a guiding text throughout.

Described by Ted Hughes as 'the father of us all', Thomas came late to poetry and it was only through his close friendship with Robert Frost that he finally turned to the form, writing all his work in just a two-year period before his death in the First World War. He was a regular walker of his surroundings on the South Downs, which are the focus for much of his poetry, and this sense of place, connecting past and present is central to his work. The act of walking helped him to shake off some of the depression and self-doubt which plagued him all his life.

The solo 'cello acts as both an embodiment of Thomas himself as well as providing the sense of travelling through a landscape with the rhythmical suggestions of walking. It plots a melodic pathway allowing the text fragments to act as viewpoints or reflections on the journey. Rather like the evolving perspectives of a walk, where one landscape merges into the next in an ever-changing perspective, so the fleeting fragments of the incomplete poetry, like unfinished thoughts, mingle together to form suggestions rather than anything complete.

The piece is also imbued with a flavor of that Edwardian *melancholy* which pervades Elgar's Cello Concerto of a few years later, as well as an intimacy, which couples the wonder of nature with a dark yearning. The choice of 'cello *obbligato* is partly suggested by this, and partly because of the highly personal (and song-like) nature of the instrument.

CR

'Roads Shining Like River Uphill After Rain' performances 2017

3.15pm Saturday 15th April (Easter Saturday) PREMIERE

New College Chapel, Oxford

Oxford Bach Soloists conducted by Tom Hammond-Davies

4.30pm Saturday 29th April

The Artshouse, Stratford-upon-Avon

(part of the Stratford Literary Festival)

Oxford Bach Soloists conducted by Tom Hammond-Davies

5pm, Sunday 17th September 2017

London, part of Open House (venue tbc)

Peagusus conducted by Matthew Altham

7.30pm, 21st October 2017

Closing concert of Wooburn Festival

Allsaints Church, Marlow

Wooburn Singers conducted by Tom Hammond-Davies

The Tim Wilton Steer Collection

Much has been written recently about The Tim Wilton Steer Collection and Petersfield Museum. Once the collection had been donated to the Fellowship it had to be moved from the Wilton Steer house. The problem was to find a safe, secure and secret storage place for it until the agreement between the Wilton Steer Family, the Fellowship and Petersfield Museum was completed and the Museum had space to store it. The solution was provided by a generous offer by Steep Church. The collection was moved to the Church by Colin Thornton and stored in an upstairs room. It comprises some 1840 items and filled over 30 large boxes. So if you visited Steep Church you would have been sitting below the collection. At the start of January the collection was moved to the Museum by Jeremy Mitchell (Committee member) and his family. Both moves required almost herculean effort. The following pictures show the boxes at Steep Church and the first phase of settling the collection into its new home at the Museum.

